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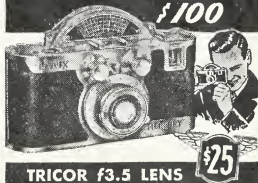
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MAY, 1939

MAGAZINE

VOL. 69, NO. 1

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The Man Who Blew

A not-soon-forgotten drama of the crisis in Europe.

HEELS clicked. There were crisp, impressive salutes; the rattle of accouterments; brisk, barked commands. The rifles of the guard came down and clanked to the floor in one single disciplined crash. The prisoner straightened his shoulders with a certain grimness. He waited. An officer signed a slip of paper.

"This way," he said curtly.

The prisoner raised his eyebrows, but he obeyed. The single officer marched ahead.

The prisoner's eyes narrowed.

"I thought," he said quietly, "that I was going to be shot."

The officer turned intolerant eyes upon him. "Your brother wishes to bid you farewell," he said.

The prisoner half-opened his mouth, then shrugged. He walked steadily after the single officer. Of course, escape from this place was as impossible as from before the rifles of a firing-squad. This was the most closely guarded of all the air-fields of the nation. Here the very latest, most secret of all air-weapons were developed and tried out. It was guarded at least as closely as the stores of rather futile yellow metal which people unreasonably valued so highly that

nobody was allowed to possess it. The air-field, in fact, was guarded more closely, for not only must any unauthorized person be prevented from entering it, but even more definitely, all spies must be prevented from leaving.

The officer, leading, turned a corner. A sentry stood there. Another corner—another sentry. There were two sentries before another door. They saluted. The officer entered that door. The prisoner followed. The officer said solemnly, "Your brother," clicked his heels, and saluted, then formally turned upon a heel and stalked out.

The door slammed; it locked.

Illustrated
by Grattan
Condon



up a War

By WILL
JENKINS



The patrol was frantically suspicious—but it was too late now.

Kurt stood erect, and triumphant.

"It grieves me, David, that we should part in this way."

The prisoner shrugged.

"My dear Kurt, we parted—how many years ago? You called me a traitor; I called you a fool—and that was the end of it. To be polite, I should ask how you fare, though."

"I am permitted," said Kurt reverently, with the fine glow of fanaticism in his eyes, "to sacrifice myself for our country. So I asked to speak to you before you were shot, in hope that I could bring a proper spirit to you."



The officer presented the prisoner—said solemnly, "Your brother."

"A last-minute conversion, eh?" said the prisoner. "A sort of deathbed repentance of all my decent actions? Does my sentence include this, Kurt?"

His brother looked at his watch.

"In two hours," he said earnestly, "I will be annihilated! I volunteered for it, blindly. Now that I know what I am to do, I am deeply proud that I am permitted to sacrifice myself—for victory for our nation. I can tell you. You will be one of a mere half-dozen who know. But if you are going to be ironic—"

The prisoner said mildly:

"If you're going to get yourself killed, my dear fellow, we are brothers in misfortune as well as—to your regret—in blood. Of course I'll listen. But I know you are a fanatic, Kurt, so I sha'n't reciprocate by confidences such as your damned fellow-fanatics have been trying to torture out of me recently. And I think I'll take a cigarette."

He lighted up, luxuriously. His brother crossed his knees. He made a stiff, unsuccessful attempt at the casual.

"My tale is one of treachery," said Kurt. "You know that we—our nation

—have but one ally in all the world—only one companion in ideology which even pretends a friendship. And you know that we even hold joint war maneuvers with our ally now, the two armies coöperating behind their own frontiers against a phantom common enemy from the west."

"I know it now," said the prisoner dryly. "But I haven't been supplied with daily papers."

"While the war game goes on," said Kurt, fierceness breaking into his voice, "while the war game goes on, the chancelleries of other nations profess concern at the close coöperation of the two great totalitarian powers. It is hypocrisy! They know that our *ally*"—there was fine irony in the word—"prepares a treacherous attack! During the war game their troops have dutifully fired blank cartridges, and their artillery blank shells. But today they will be given service ammunition. Today their high command feasts with ours, pretending vast friendship with a consummate treachery. For tomorrow their troops pour across our border! The war game

is to turn to deadly earnest. They will invade us without declaration of war—and our troops will be massed for slaughter with only blank cartridges for their guns!”

“Somehow,” said the prisoner, “I suspect that that omission is being rectified.”

“It is!” agreed Kurt with fanatical triumph. “And our enemy will receive full punishment! We shall repay such treachery with the iron vengeance it deserves. Their territory and their colonies shall be added to our nation as a conquered province! Our strength will be doubled! And we will sweep onward to the heights which are our destiny!”

“Not your destiny or mine, Kurt,” said the prisoner. “Our destiny is to be killed, eh?”

“**M**INE is to sacrifice myself for our country!” said Kurt, with a look of holy mysticism in his eyes. “Today their high command will receive its reward for treason. Today I—I!—shall avenge upon its authors the plan for the devastation of our country, while our army sweeps forward to strength through battle!”

“All of which,” said the prisoner, “is very fine oratory, but does not mean anything in particular. . . . What is it, Kurt?”

“Waiting in the air-field just beyond this building,” said Kurt devoutly, “is a fast plane of the enemy’s latest type. It carries a giant bomb of the enemy’s newest, most powerful explosive. A terrific bomb! I shall go aloft with that plane. Here is my equipment.” He waved his hand beside him. “Stratosphere equipment. The enemy’s latest! I climb to thirty thousand feet. I fly south to Dasth, where the high commands feast together. I wait until five minutes of the hour. The feast takes place in an especially built pavilion reaching across the border-line of the two countries. At five minutes of the hour, I dive into the pavilion with my giant bomb. Nothing can withstand it! I die—for my country!”

He was on his feet, his eyes aflame. The prisoner winced. He said dryly:

“To be sure. You die for your country—with gestures. But in wiping out the enemy officers, doesn’t it occur to you that you may be doing some damage to a few compatriots?”

Kurt said rapidly:

“That too is arranged: An accident will call our highest ranking officers

away. A serious accident. It will happen so that the news reaches our staff in time. Our highest officers will leave, inviting the leader of the enemy State to come and inspect the trivial disaster—it will be an explosion of blank ammunition. And at fifteen minutes of the hour, our essential officers will be away. But the enemy officers will await their return to conclude the luncheon. And I flash down from the skies! On the instant of the explosion the head of the enemy nation will be arrested. Those who accompany him will be seized. They will be charged with a plot to assassinate our officers, recoiled upon themselves through an error in timing. Our troops will march forward to avenge it. They will encounter the enemy’s troops, already partly armed with ball ammunition. The enemy’s perfidy will be proved—but his high command will be wiped out! There will be no one to give orders! Before the enemy can improvise a command, with all leaders dead or in our hands, it will be too late to resist!”

The prisoner, frowning, inhaled deeply at his cigarette.

“It’s obvious that I’m not to be reprieved,” he observed. “After you’ve told me all this, I have to be shot! But Kurt, my dear fellow, the leaders of our nation are not, after all, paragons of truthfulness. If by any chance our allies do not intend to invade us without warning—if by any chance you’ve merely been lied to, you’ll be doing a particularly ghastly thing. In fact, it seems rather ghastly to me, anyhow. It’s murder—though these days that’s a normal part of war. Tell me: how do you know it’s so?”

HIS brother turned fanatic eyes upon him.

“Because I, in secret service, discovered it!”

The prisoner, still frowning, nodded.

“Then it’s true,” he said distastefully. “You are a fanatic, Kurt, and I think you’re a fool. But you’re not a liar. . . . What a mess this civilization is! The war you’ll start will help destroy it, anyhow.” . . . Then he said suddenly: “Listen to me, Kurt! You are my younger brother. There is such a thing as honor, which even patriotism cannot demand as a sacrifice. Your country can ask you to die; but to commit mass murder, even of your own countrymen left as bait at the feasting-table—no nation may ask an officer and a gentleman to do such a thing!” He added,

swiftly, urgently: "If there's to be a war, let there be war! If it's to begin with treachery by an ally, let it! But don't let it begin with mass murder, treacherous murder, by one of us!"

HE went on almost pleadingly: "Kurt, very soon I am to be shot for fighting for what I believe to be decency, but that doesn't matter. There's no reason for you to die a murderer for the same insanity that's murdering me! Take off, Kurt—but don't do it! Land somewhere and set fire to the plane. Let it be destroyed. Go find some sane place and live peacefully—"

His brother said proudly:

"It was at my request that they prepared the plane so that if there is a forced landing, it will explode at the touch of earth. I carry no parachute. Once I take off, there is no landing."

"Then refuse—"

"I will speak to no man but you, David, from this time on. I walk from this room to the flying-field. The plane is already warming up. I put on my stratosphere suit, and I go to the plane and fly away, and I am never heard of again. Should there be fragments of the plane left, they will be enemy fragments. It is nearly time, David. I asked to see you, that you might see how proudly, how gladly I go to my death for our country. You, alas, are to die for opposition to its destiny. I have not time to speak the things I would wish to say to you, but I have written them. And after what I have said to you, you cannot, of course, be allowed to speak to anyone. But you will be left in this room for twenty-four hours. You will have time to read all my message to you. Do this, David, I beg of you! And it may be that then, when you face the firing-squad, you may leave behind a message of such firm conviction of your mistake, such unalterable patriotism, that—"

"Damnation," said the prisoner in a white fury. "It would be like you to have all that written out for me!"

"It is true," admitted Kurt earnestly. "I have written suggestions. *'For the Faith—'*"

The prisoner said unsteadily:

"Kurt, this has gone too far. I've something to whisper in your ear. You think—"

He went quietly to his brother's side. He bent over him. And then he struck so savage, so fierce, so terrible a blow that Kurt went horribly limp on the

instant. The prisoner caught him as he sagged.

"I feel," he thought, swallowing a lump in his throat, "like Cain."

But then he became busy—frantically busy. From his own sturdy, coarse prison garb he tore stout strips. He bound his unconscious brother carefully. He gagged him ruthlessly. Then he listened. He heard nothing. Then he put on the stratosphere suit his brother was to have worn. He remembered to put on his brother's watch. It would be sure to have been carefully synchronized. His brother's eyes opened dazedly. Then they widened. Then stark horror, sheer anguished despair, shone in his eyes, as convulsive writhings were useless, and his utmost effort made no greater sound than a faint moan.

"I'm taking your orders, Kurt," said the prisoner gravely. "I'm to be killed anyhow. I might as well do some good."

His brother's eyes were frantically accusing.

"In my own small way," said the prisoner wryly, "I'm a patriot too. I'll take up the ship, and I know I can't land it. Nobody can. So—well, I'll take your place. I'll dive it into the pavilion at Dasth. The time is supposed to be five minutes before the hour. Our people—the important ones—will leave ten minutes earlier. That's right, isn't it?" Then he said slowly: "I imagine you'll be left alone for twenty-four hours. You said I was to have been. I hope, though, Kurt, that you won't take my place before the firing-squad. If I take your place for you, you shouldn't."

He nodded, smiling almost remorsefully at his brother. He closed the visor of the altitude-helmet. He went to the door and knocked authoritatively.

It opened; he turned and saw it closed behind him—and locked. An officer stood at stiff salute. He acknowledged it as stiffly. Within the glass of the altitude-helmet his face—enough like his brother's in any case—was partly obscured. He walked toward the flying-field. Sentries presented arms. Twice, officers stood at stiff salute to the man who went out to die.

THE plane stood waiting, its motor growling impatiently. The propeller-blades twinkled lazily in the sun. He walked stiffly toward it. Again two officers saluted.

He climbed in. With a practiced hand he went through the ritual tests of the

controls. He waved his hand. He opened the throttle. The plane leaped forward. It lifted. It began to climb. He went up in a steep tight spiral. It was queerly pleasant to be free and aloft once more. He could not land, of course. The touch of earth, now, meant the explosion of a thousand kilograms of death. But while the gasoline lasted—

Fifteen thousand feet. . . . Twenty. The oxygen apparatus worked splendidly. The new army ships were magnificent. He admired this craft dispassionately. Thirty thousand feet—and it was handling almost as well as if at sea-level. He headed south. Clouds drifted past below him. Earth was a mist-dimmed, unreal bowl. It took conscious effort to identify this and that large area. So much of the world was open to his view! He saw cities twenty-five—thirty—fifty miles away. He saw a river which he knew, and mountains he had climbed on foot. Then the little lake which was about Dasth.

He looked at the clock in the instrument-board, then at his brother's watch. They tallied to the second. Thirty minutes before the hour. He should drift along idly for twenty minutes more. In fifteen minutes the essential members of his country's high command would leave the pavilion of the fraternal feast. In another five he should start to descend; should orient himself thoroughly, but not reveal his presence. In twenty-five minutes he should be hurtling down. . . .

He knew where the pavilion should be. He and Kurt had spent a summer month at Dasth when they were children. Even from six miles up, knowing the lake and the town, he could tell exactly where it would be. And now the high commands of both great nations and the leaders of the two countries lunched in a vast cordiality, while the one planned treachery for the morrow, and the other planned murder for today.

Otto pushed in his throttle. The plane settled steadily as he cruised in vast circles, losing altitude steadily. Twenty-five thousand feet. Twenty. Eighteen—

"Both crowds," said Otto conversationally to himself, "have been spouting of traditions and race and the need to expand, of destiny and inflexible resolve. Each planning to betray the other, and both betraying the simple decent people who'll die in the war and be murdered afterward. There's no real choice between them. Their crowd is as rotten as ours, and ours as rotten as theirs."



Kurt sagged, horribly limp. "I feel," the prisoner thought, "like Cain."

THE MAN WHO BLEW UP A WAR

Fifteen thousand feet. Far below, something like a patrol of scout-planes rose from the ground. Too far away to know which nation they belonged to. Both nations, though, with uneasy consciences, would send scouts up to investigate an unscheduled plane flying above so important a meeting as this, of two army high commands plus the political leaders of two nations.

"They can't tell which way I came from," murmured the man who had been a prisoner, calmly. "And my uniform won't give anybody a chance to accuse either side if there's anything left of it afterward. So that doesn't matter."

He pushed the nose of the plane over.

"This," he said dispassionately, "is an experiment. If their crowd got wiped out, my crowd would take over their country. If our crowd got wiped out, they'd do the same to us. So—"

The ship was diving with a very terrible, steady increase of speed. Wind whistling past the cowling made a screaming noise which rose constantly in pitch.

"So it's a worth-while experiment to try wiping out both crowds. If it's desirable to leave nobody alive to give orders for defense, it ought to be still more desirable to leave nobody alive to give orders for attack."

The altimeter said six thousand feet. The air-speed indicator had hit the pin at four hundred miles an hour. It could go no farther. But he pulled out the throttle again. All the way.

Four thousand feet. For a brief instant whirling things flickered about him, firing futile machine-gun bursts at his plane. They were left behind. The patrol of scout-planes was frantically suspicious, but none of their pilots had become quite convinced in time to crash him in midair—and it was too late now.

Three thousand feet. Two thousand feet. He made infinitely slight adjustments of the controls. He saw the pavilion clearly. There was one man starting to run out of it. He wouldn't get far enough. Not from a bomb this size. The pavilion enlarged with an incredible swiftness. He would hit fairly in the center. He found himself thinking absurdly:

"Quaint, this, trying to blow up a war with a bomb!"

Then he hit. And he saw for one brief instant an intolerable flare of flame.

It was the flame which blew up the war—because it did not leave anybody alive to give orders to start it.



Illustrated by
L. R. Gustavson

Skipper

By H. BEDFORD.

CAPTAIN RAWLINS snorted down his bushy whiskers and glared at us.

"Seamanship! Ships! Why, blast it all, what does it take to be a skipper in steam? Nothing. Less than nothing. Any lubber who can lean on the Hydrographic Office and the radio and all them gadgets, can get his job done for him gratis. Steam killed the old-time skipper."

"No," said Captain Merriam gently. He was a little old man, a great student of sea lore; we were sitting in his cabin and sampling his Demerara rum.

"Nothing of the sort, Rawlins," he went on, thoughtfully squeezing a drop of juice from a green lime into his rum. "You're like all these chaps who think



Steam (and paddle wheels) helped the Greyhound on her exciting voyage. . . . The twenty-ninth story in the "Ships and Men" series.

of the Greyhound

JONES *and* CAPTAIN L. B. WILLIAMS

there was a sudden jump from sail to steam; but there wasn't. It was a gradual transition. Steam put an end to the clipper ships, yes."

"Far from it," I put in, brashly venturing to splinter lances with these two old seadogs. "What about the Black Ball Line?"

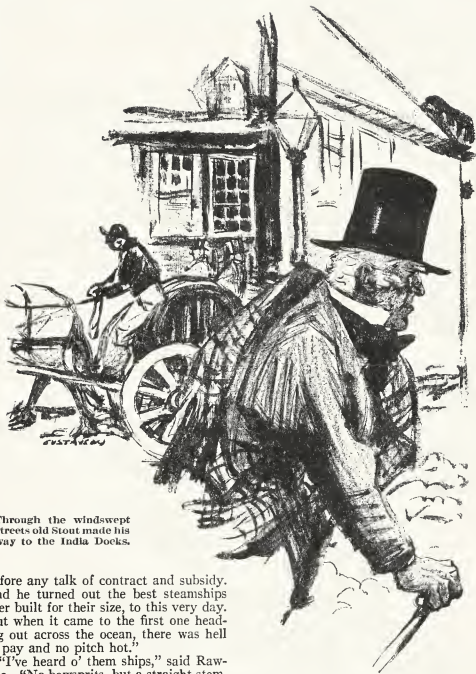
"Whoosh!" Captain Rawlins snorted again. "Damned steam packets!"

"No, no," said Merriam. "Let's talk about the Dramatic Line instead—the old Dramatic of Boston, and E. K. Collins, and his shore-skipper Cap'n Stout, and how the transition from the old clippers really took place. You know, that first voyage of the *Greyhound* was an epic, seen through the eyes of Cap'n Wallace, who took her across the Atlantic.

Conflict? Rascality? Tough work? Why, Wallace had everything to beat on that voyage, and a thousand times everything—including the Cunarders and the Atlantic and the blackest sort of treachery. The clipper ships were dead; the Britishers were sweeping everything before them—and it was Collins who had the vision to build up the American steam packets, as an evolution of clipper ships."

"Evolution?" demanded Captain Rawlins sharply, pawing at his red whiskers. "Evolution?"

"Aye. Collins had everything against him, too. Before he could get any mail contract, the Government stipulated that his ships must be at least two thousand tons' burthen, and must prove their worth



Through the windswept streets old Stout made his way to the India Docks.

before any talk of contract and subsidy. And he turned out the best steamships ever built for their size, to this very day. But when it came to the first one heading out across the ocean, there was hell to pay and no pitch hot."

"I've heard o' them ships," said Rawlins. "No bowsprits, but a straight stem, a wedge-shaped bow, and a long, easy run curving to a graceful stern; and so high out o' the water, they were dry and comfortable. Three-masters, aye. I remember; the Dramatic Line, it was, sure enough. What's it about the first one to sail?"

"Wasn't settled until the last minute who'd go master," Merriam responded. "There'd been trouble; dirty work and plenty of it. A lot of people didn't want to see the new American packet go through. Collins had enemies. Jealousy was rampant. Commercial interests had

a finger in the pie. And when the *Greyhound* was loaded and ready, her passengers all aboard, within an hour of sailing-time, what happened?"

We stared at him as he paused, and I spoke up impatiently.

"Well, I'll bite. What happened?"

"Her master up and disappeared; bought off, likely. Something had to be done, and done fast; and in the Collins office you can bet there was a hot scene. Picture Collins himself there, a genius



in his way, but caught all unprepared, and with him old Cap'n Stout, his shore-skipper. And outside, the wind was blowing off the hinges of hell—"

A GUSTY scene outdoors and in, with the history of transatlantic shipping hanging in the balance, with success or failure staring Collins in the face. He could trust old Stout, and not another soul. He had suddenly realized that treachery, sabotage and worse lay aboard the *Greyhound* waiting to snare him, and this shook the very heart in him.

"Bully Cowles could take her out," he observed.

Cap'n Stout spat an oath.

"Be damned to him! I tell you, Cowles is crooked from stem to stern! Because his family has influence, because he's good in his way, you've got faith in him; but you don't know him the way I do. No! If anyone takes out the *Greyhound* this day, it must be a man who knows how to look slap into hell. We've a dozen prime masters at hand, but—"

"But they know nothing about steam," said Collins.

"Right. Give me the say and ask no questions—and I'll guarantee she sails on the nick and wins the Liverpool race. Yes or no?"

Collins looked with haunted eyes at the bluff, savage old master.

"You're the one man I'd trust to Halifax and back, Stout," he said simply. "It's your say, old friend; go ahead. I'll stand back of anything you do. Who's the man?"

Cap'n Stout struggled into his coat, caught up his hat, opened the door, and then paused briefly to make reply.

"Robbie Wallace," he snapped, and slammed the door shut on any protest.

Through windswept streets he made his way; twenty minutes later he was clawing over the gangway of the three-sky-sail-yarder *Black Eagle*, moored with other tall clippers at India Docks. Since morning the wind had been whipping over the crowded basin and the craft moored there. Shore-fasts had been doubled and even trebled; worried mates drove seamen almost as hard as though they were at sea. The mates were wise. The wind was increasing, and it would be no joke if a ship came adrift in the basin while the great steam-packet *Greyhound* was beating to sea.

"You had best think twice afore you act, Robbie. I tell you the crew's angry!"



Halting at the clipper's galley, Stout sent a stentorian shout forward to where Wallace was getting out spring lines, and turned in. Five minutes after, Wallace stamped into the galley, wiping rain out of his eyes. A young fellow, Wallace, master of this clipper only for the past year: young, trim, hard of eye and mouth and hand, and the very apple of Cap'n Stout's eye.

"I'm shifting you today." Stout had a mug of coffee in one hand and a cruller in the other, and spoke from a full mouth. "Right now. Pack your gear and get aboard the *Greyhound*. Move lively! She's to sail in an hour."

"The *Greyhound*?" said Wallace, staring at him. "Why, I was to keep this ship! And I thought—"

"You thought?" Cap'n Stout emitted a roar and a spatter of cruller crumbs. "Thought you were a fixture here with your loblolly seamen! Well, you're not."

"So that's it!" The face of Wallace flamed brick red. "Sending me aboard her as second or third, eh? Well, I'm for steam; it's the coming thing. But you can give E. K. my compliments and both of you go to hell! I'll ship as cook in a coaster before I'll step down from master to be mate of that paddle-wheel tub."

Wallace checked himself, catching a twinkle in Stout's eye.

"You're taking command, Robbie."

"Command? Me?" Wallace could feel the heart-leap register in his eyes and voice. "Command of a steamer? Of all the luck! Why, there's graybeards in port who commanded ships when I was a pup—"

"Graybeards and mossbacks who can't get sail out of their eyes." Stout abandoned his brusque, blowing manner and became confidential. "It's your job, if you can handle it. Her skipper disappeared; you're master now. They'll know better than to try to buy you out, you that's been like my own son to me; but they'll try other tricks. There's devil-try aboard."

"What sort?" snapped Wallace.

STOUT grunted into his coffee. If I knew, would I be worried? Well, get started! E. K. wants a word with you, and there's plenty of important matters to look after."

"You're not sending her out in this blow?" Wallace said. "This will turn into a duster before dark; it'll be dangerous work beating out."

"You mossback sailing-ship master!" sneered the older man. "Come snow, come blow, the cursed British are sailing a steam-packet tonight from New York. You must beat 'em across, for the mail contracts. That's the orders. The whole

future existence of the line depends on it."

He gulped his coffee, slammed down the mug, and clamped on his hat.

"It's no bed o' roses, Cap'n Wallace," he rumbled grimly. "You're the one man we can trust; you know a bit about work in steam; you make or break with us, and you do it now. And God help you! Plenty of people want to stop us. It's like every new thing; all the world's ag'in' it; there's more enemies than we know. There's one man aboard the *Greyhound* to rejoice your heart—and a score who won't. No help for it. You've got to take the mess and handle it man style."

"My job," Wallace said curtly, to hide the springing exultation of his heart. "I'll do it."

HIS ship, his ship! He scarcely knew what intervened, realized not at all the few words with E. K. Collins, until he was standing on her deck at last, with Cap'n Stout at his side. His ship! The first of the Yankee line to battle storm and British and monopoly; and himself to make or break with her.

His ship! His crew, his passengers, his risk, his responsibility; and back of him, standing or falling with him, the Dramatic Line, the dreams of Collins, the new vista of shipping and commerce across the world. Standing on the windy quarterdeck, he went hot and cold by turns. The whitecaps whipping over the water, the swaying masts of the tall clippers moored inside the basin; storm and stress against him, and worse—

"I think you've been shipmates before, gentlemen," Captain Stout was saying.

Wallace looked at the massive, round-shouldered man, twenty years his senior, and shook hands mechanically, with a downthrust of his heart. Bully Cowles, yes; saturnine, vindictive, and competent. An unloved man, with powerful influence ashore, and hatred in his eyes for this younger officer stepped up over his head.

"Aye," said Cowles, without enthusiasm. "I think you sailed under me as third, some time back."

"Right. I hope we hit it off in this smoke-pot," Wallace rejoined. "I've sailed a bit in steam, but I'm still green at it. I hope we can pull together, Mister."

"I'll do my job, sir." Cowles touched the peak of his sou'wester and somehow made the respectful gesture an insult.

"Wish ye luck, Cap'n!" he growled, and returned to his work forward.

"Wishes ye in Tophet, rather!" Cap'n Stout emitted a snort. "Twenty year with Collins and the Dramatic Line; two master's jobs blowed to hell; and himself as well, if I had my say. Now he hates the sight of you. How soon can you pull out?"

"When everything's made fast. I have twenty minutes' leeway; going below for a pipe. Will you come?"

"No; I'll say good-by now." Stout put out his hand. "Make or break, Robbie, and God bless you!"

Down in the cabin, Wallace laid aside the coat and plug hat, symbol of a captain in that day, and got his oilskins ready to don once more. He disregarded the gold-braided uniform laid out for him, and with his pipe alight began to pace up and down the cabin. So Cowles was aboard! That meant trouble. . . .

A loud, hard knock at the door. The man outside jerked it open and stepped in without awaiting an invitation. A stout, heavily muscled man with broad red face and ginger hair, who stood unsmiling at the new skipper. He had a streak of yellow grease across his broken nose, and was redolent of oil and cinders.

"Jerry!" Wallace caught his breath. "Jerry O'Dowd, or I'm a Dutchman! Are you the engineer aboard this tub?"

O'Dowd gripped hands with him, and the red face suddenly grinned widely.

"So Robbie Wallace it is, and now a master—oh, it's good to find you here, Robbie! Cap'n Stout, the old rascal, told me to take a look at the new skipper, and never a word that it was you. I'm glad to see you, lad."

WALLACE drew a deep breath. So this was what Stout had meant by one man aboard to rejoice his heart!

"Not as glad as I am to see you, Jerry; not by half," he said gravely. "How are your coffee-grinders?"

"Ready to go at the first jangle o' the bell," said the chief briskly. "And the black gang's with you, even if the deck swabs aint."

"So that's the ticket, eh?" Wallace puffed at his pipe, as he met the shrewd little eyes. "How about the mates?"

"Well, the third might stand by you, in a pinch." O'Dowd wrinkled up his nose. "If you ask me, there's a gang o' Liverpool rats aboard to curl your hair!"

"I see. Cowles would have a crowd of his own choosing. Look here, Jerry!

Is Bully Cowles the rascal back of whatever's going on here?"

"Nothing so easy as that, Robbie." It came hard to O'Dowd, who had known this young man from the cradle, who had loved his mother and lost her—it came hard to put on the "sir," here in private. He, like Cap'n Stout, had watched this seaman grow to full size, and hoped for greater stature yet.

"Them as pays the coin, stops safe ashore," he went on, wrinkling up his nose again—an unlovely habit, but denoting thought on his part. "Them as takes the coin, does the job. Who? I dunno. I've picked up talk. One or two in the passenger-cabins, I'd say."

Gusty anger seized Wallace. "It's a dirty business, all of it! A damned dirty business. To hell with steam packets!"

"Easy, now," cautioned the other gently, shrewdly. "It's a new business, Robbie; it's got to be broke in. You're the man to break it in; master it! When ye got your ticket, it was as master—mind that. *Master!* That's the proper word. Cowles and his rats won't start anything below decks, take my word for it. See to the decks yourself. Agreed?"

Wallace seized the big, hard fist. "Agreed, Jerry. We'll break—or make!"

WHEN Wallace took his place on the quarterdeck, it was with a queer sense of desertion. The crowd on the dock, the blaring brass band, had all gone; the gusty squalls of rain had wiped them all into cover. Only Cap'n Stout stood there, alone, resolute, his arm waving. Wallace answered the wave, and turned forward.

Having none too much confidence in the steam power, he had ordered the yards braced around, the jibs, and fore and main topstails set. He picked up his trumpet and ordered the shore-fasts off, and spoke to the third officer.

"Slow speed ahead, both engines." Then, glancing at the pilot, who stood before the helmsman: "I'll take her out, Cap'n Downs, with your permission."

The special Collins pilot, a grizzled Cape Codder, met his eyes and nodded, and stepped to leeward. The mist and gusty rain obscured everything. The wind, pushing lustily against the braced yards and jibs, was shoving them broadside away from the pier. The huge side-paddles were threshing the water now. Under both steam and sail, the *Greyhound* approached the narrow entrance of the basin.

Then, just as the fairway opened, a British three-sticker popped her shore-fasts with explosions like cannon-shots. Like a wind-blown chip, her towering spars caught the gusts; she drifted out into the fairway, squarely athwart the *Greyhound's* course.

"Full speed astern!" lashed out Wallace's voice. "For'ard, there! Back topsails, down jibs. You at the wheel—port helm, hard a-weather! Into the wind with her—smartly, you ship-keepers, smartly! Jump alive there, Mister!"

He had a swift vision of Cowles, up forward, moving leisurely about. His voice lashed the men; they jumped to the work.

ONLY the swiftness of those orders saved the day. Wallace could not credit the thing as an accident; yet he could not make himself believe it was deliberate. He rapped a torrent of oaths through his trumpet at the limeys, as the steam packet slid past her; then they were safely out of the basin and clear of the inside hazards.

He ordered more sail spread. Again he saw Cowles, up forward, noted his slack obedience; but held his peace. He kept his ship close to the East Boston side, recklessly skirting the shore, and caught up his trumpet again.

"Mister! Unfurl courses. Pile on that canvas, you lubbers—smartly!"

He turned to the watchful, concerned pilot, as the ship heeled under the press of taut canvas, and laughed.

"She may be a paddle-wheeler, but it takes canvas to beat out in this duster, Cap'n Downs! Tell that to E. K. when you see him. Without sail, we'd have piled her on Noddles, there to leeward—Mind your helm, you blasted packet-rat!" His blare leaped at the helmsman. "That's Bird Island ahead. Shiver that topsail just once, and I'll brain you!"

Out and away from sprawling Boston town, past Noddles Island to the north and Governor's to the south, dimly seen through the storm-wrack, the *Greyhound* ratched her way with sail bulging and inky smoke trailing from her tall funnel.

A good ship, Wallace thought; a stout ship, but a smart sailer. A little stiff as yet; that was to be expected. He nodded with satisfaction and faced forward, his keen eye searching out the bulky figure of the mate, watchfully. He spoke over his shoulder to the third mate, at the telegraphs.

"Give her all she'll take—full ahead with both engines."

Past Apple Island, close-hauled on the starboard tack; then Deer Island, a biscuit-toss under his lee. Now his voice harried the mate and the hands forward, until they toiled like devils to brace around; and off rushed the ship past Deer Island, through Necks Mate and outside.

"Well done, lad!" The old pilot clapped him on the arm. "Good luck to you, and to hell with the others! You'll make it."

He was gone with the pilot-boat, a dancing chip on the waters. Cowles headed aft, and with a careless word to Wallace took his position deliberately to windward, the undisputed post for a skipper under way.

"I'll watch her," he growled, hunching his bulky shoulders aggressively. "You can go below and accept the congratulations of the passengers, sir."

Wallace stepped up to him, and caught a whiff of liquor. He took Cowles by the shoulder and suddenly clamped it in his iron fingers until the man winced and swung about.

"You're the one to go below, Mister, and do it in a hurry," he said, loudly enough for the helmsman and third officer to hear. "And stay there until you sober up. No officer of mine comes on duty drunk. The next offense will put you in your cabin until the voyage ends. That's the last word on it. Get!"

For a long minute Cowles stood facing the skipper, his lips a thin red gash of fury, his eyes ablaze. Then he wilted.

"Aye, sir," he said, and obeyed.

THE second mate, having finished his duties, came aft and reported, offering to take over the watch in the mate's place. Wallace studied him briefly, and with a curt nod of assent, yielded the deck. The second was a tall Bluenose with narrow features and cold gray eyes. There was little love or fidelity in that man.

Nor in the obsequious steward who brought him a meal in his own cabin.

"Some o' the passengers are asking for you, sir," said the man. "They think maybe we shouldn't ha' put to sea in this blow."

"I'm running the ship," Wallace said curtly. "Clear out. I want some sleep. Waken me at eight bells."

The passengers! He remembered what Jerry O'Dowd had said; no, Cowles was

only a part of the whole thing. As later he lay in his heaving berth and tried to sleep, he felt an access of disgust and horror and incredulity. This treachery and intrigue, this fog of distrust, this atmosphere of unreliable officers and men—why, it was an unheard-of condition! It was not the sea as he knew it, or as he wanted to know it.

"Steam packets be damned!" he said to the darkness. "And yet—I took it with my eyes open. Stout warned me. Commercialism, eh? If we win clear, it's a new epoch for new ships, the dawn of a new day for shipping and commerce. Aye, it's worth fighting all the devils to put over such a thing! I'm the one to break the way, that's all. Ten years from now, a new code of ethics, new customs, new ways, will crystallize around this new type of ship. Sail's passing out. Like breaking a trail in deep snow—the man who does it catches all the hell. Take it on the chin, Robbie Wallace, and stand up to it!"

He fell asleep smiling.

ALL night he drove the *Greyhound* under both sail and steam, savagely resolved to take the lead from that British packet which had sailed from New York at the same hour. But by morning the gale had increased to such violence that he bent his will to it, hove to under the main-topsail alone and shut down the thrashing engines to save the paddles. The wind had hauled around to the northeast with full gale force; the ship rolled and tossed and plunged in the frantic sea like a mad thing.

Scarcely had he got things shipshape, when a palpably frightened delegation of four passengers sought him out on the quarterdeck. They protested his driving the ship in such fashion. Below, they said, all was hell let loose; cabin furniture was splintered; water had flooded the saloons; ports were smashed; the women were terrorized. Wallace regarded them with a flinty eye. Then, as they went on to repeat what the mate had said, he stiffened, his lips white-ringed.

"Thank you, gentlemen," he said quietly. "I trust that there'll be no further cause for alarm. That's all."

He sent for the chief mate. Presently Cowles came clawing aft, and one glance into the man's face was enough.

"Still drinking, are you?" he lashed out. "Now, you yellow dog, you've overstepped yourself. You've belittled the master's ability and judgment before the

passengers. You told 'em this was my first command in steam, that I was green and—"

Cowles erupted in a passionate rage.

"Aye, so I did, and would again, ye blasted upstart! You're sailin' us all to hell; passengers sick and scared to death, the hands for'ard on the edge of mutiny from your slave-driving—"

Wallace struck without warning, but he had timed the blow to the thrust of the reeling deck. It seemed no more than a flick of his arm; no display about it. To the smack of the hard fist, Cowles looked astonished, and then collapsed in his tracks. Wallace had been raised in a one-blow school, and had made the most of his teaching.

"Mr. Fletcher!" Wallace swung to the second officer, who clung to the weather stays. "Lug this mutinous dog below and lock him in his cabin; I'll log charges against him. Have we any irons aboard?"

"Irons, sir?" The Bluenose stared. "But Mr. Cowles wasn't responsible. You hit him."

Wallace stepped toward him. "You too, eh? So you're working against Collins instead of for him also, eh?"

The second sprang back, his long face a mask of snarling hatred.

"Hands off me, Cap'n! I'm already witness to your striking the chief officer. It'll mean your ticket and your job together!"

"That's as it may be, when we learn who's paying you," rasped Wallace. "Lug that drunkard below and bring me the key of his cabin. Any talk out of you to the passengers, and you'll go the same way. Move, you swine!"

The Bluenose obeyed.

WALLACE paced the heaving deck, slowly, methodically. To himself he cursed the Dramatic Line and all in it. The insolence of Cowles was explained; a deliberate attempt to make him lose his temper and strike. He had done it—harder than Cowles had anticipated. He would do it again if necessary. Job be damned, and ticket to boot! He was master here. The Shipmasters' Association would uphold him in it. Why had old Stout put this ship in his hands? Because no other master in the line would be willing to make or break! That was it—make or break! He was one man who would forget all except the basic fact; he was master here. Old Jerry had hit the nail on the head.

"Master, aye! And by God, they'll learn it!" muttered Wallace, and felt power grow in him. Forget everything else; rules be damned! He was master of his ship.

Yet as the day advanced and drew toward night, he realized what madness it had been to sail in this weather. Before evening the wind was blowing a ninety-mile gale, the ship straining a low and aloft in every timber. At four bells in the first watch, two cargo hatches were stove by boarding combers. The cotton bales stored there, a trans-shipment from Charlestown, were wet.

Wallace watched, grimly delighted, as Mr. Fletcher drove the men; Bluenose was working for his own life now. The sodden, half-frozen seamen labored in the icy spume and got new battens and hatch-covers rigged.

BELOW-DECKS, O'Dowd was having trouble. Although the engines were stopped, the engineers remained at work, knee-deep on the swishing floor-plates; water was in the wells, and steam had to be kept up, to drive the pumps. In this stress Wallace was forced to rescind his orders; a penitent, respectful message from Cowles, the need of having every officer on hand, impelled him to restore the mate to duty. Sober enough now was Cowles; his lesson was learned, thought Wallace. . . .

All storms, though, must end; another day found the *Greyhound* swinging along over the green rollers, her paddles slapping the water, her canvas drawing to a fair southeast wind. Wallace, with an eight-hour sleep behind him, received with frozen features the compliments of his passengers. He himself had little to say, but wondered which of these men were really friends, and which were hidden enemies.

His first elation on finding the ship had sustained no great damage, had died away. Mr. Cowles was respectful and subdued—too subdued. Mr. Fletcher was subservient—too much so. The entire ship was shaken down into smooth-running perfection, all too perfect. Not reason, but instinct, told Wallace to look out for unsuspected squalls. The days flitted finely—all too finely.

Jerry O'Dowd stalked into his cabin one night.

"Three days to the Fastnets, I hear," said he abruptly. "And you walking up Mersey Docks in your fine gold-braided cutaway and your stovepipe hat—is that

As Fletcher swung around, he was met by a crushing blow that sent him reeling against the rail.



what's in your mind the night, Robbie Wallace?"

Wallace gave the chief his keen, searching glance.

"You're not a good mind-reader, Jerry. Three more days to raise the Fastnets, aye; but the glass is dropping fast."

"And you'll need hot pitch to pay the Old Nick," said O'Dowd darkly.

"What's up?"

"Ye've made a damned fast passage; it'll be a record. What would your mate and your second be doing in the fore-peak wi' the men? Why would one or the other be walking the deck with passengers and talking in odd corners? Why would these packet-rats up for'ard all of a sudden have secrets? Something's brewing."

"So I've felt, without knowing why." And Wallace frowned. "You and your gang have kept an eye open, eh?"

"Both eyes, Robbie. It's proud I am to see you a real ship's master."

"That'll come in good time, maybe," said Wallace; and each understood the other. . . .

An icy blast from the North Sea, and the glass falling, and the engines shut down to save the racing paddles. Wallace pacing the deck for a day and a night, seizing a bit of sleep when he might. Storm staysails set, and an inky, wind-swept day that kept the sick passengers praying in their bunks. . . .

Another dawn, with the scud low-flying and the gray combers racing and bursting. Wallace had turned in a bit after midnight. He was wakened to the gray light by Jerry O'Dowd stalking into his cabin and shaking him.

"It's come, lad. Wake up to it."

"Eh?" Wallace hung over the weather-board of his berth, staring. "What's up?"

"Plenty, or I miss my guess. Mr. Cowles has the deck, and we've passed a

ship to windward, showing distress signals."

Wallace looked at the tell-tale, the big course-needle on the ceiling of his cabin, and leaped to the deck.

"Is Cowles heading up for her? Is that why we're off our course? And he didn't send word to me?"

"No," said O'Dowd. "He's passed her, I tell you. Half an hour or more ago."

Wallace stood staring for a moment. Passed a ship with distress signals, and no word sent to the captain! With a rush, he jerked on his clothes and went to his desk, and flung it open. He took two pistols from their case, examined the loads, and thrust them into his pockets.

"Did you see the ship yourself?" he demanded.

"Aye," said O'Dowd grimly. "A steamer, looked like; hard to tell. She'd lost a lot of top-hamper. You'd best think twice afore you act, Robbie. I tell you, the crew's ugly, and—"

"Stand by if you like, Jerry," said Wallace. "If this is the pinch, I'll play it for all it's worth."

COWLES was at the weather side of the quarterdeck, chewing tobacco and perversely spitting to windward. He halted at sight of Wallace, and his eyes hardened into slits.

"Why did you change course without orders, Mister?" Wallace asked quietly.

"Thought we'd better bear up a point or two to windward, sir; making enough leeway—"

"Why didn't you report sighting and passing a ship, Mister?"

"Not worth while, sir."

"A ship, flying distress signals?"

"Flyin' a hoist o' some kind," growled Cowles. "Couldn't make out the flags, but I took it to be a greeting—"

"You lie," said Wallace. "You've deliberately violated the most sacred code of the sea, and disgraced this ship and the line, by refusing help to a distressed ship. All hands, Mister, and make sail!" He turned to the helmsman. "Down helm. Steer nor'-nor'-west."

The man obeyed. Wallace caught a stir and a faint cry from forward. Mr. Fletcher and half a dozen men were clambering out of the Number Two hold, their faces streaked and blackened. Behind them a tendril of smoke was issuing from the open hatchway. They came piling aft, all of them.

Her paddles threshing the water, the *Greyhound* pointed into the wind and methodically climbed the green rollers. The icy wind sang through the rigging; the ship rolled and creaked, the tall black stack spouting smoke and cinders which whipped about the silent gathering on the quarterdeck.

"Make sail, Mister!" The voice of Wallace was like a saw rasping iron. "Put everything on her but the royals and brace around on the starboard tack. We're going back to that distressed ship."

"You can't do that, sir," burst forth Cowles furiously. "We couldn't risk a boat in this sea; the passengers won't stand for it! And the hands won't lay aloft and break ice from the lines—"

"Right, sir," Mr. Fletcher took a step forward. "The ship's afire, Cap'n, and making water below. To go back now would endanger the lives of every man aboard. We've got to think of the passengers, sir! We must hold our course and try to make port—"

Wallace ignored the second mate. "Make sail, Mr. Cowles. Everything but the royals."

"You fool!" Cowles whirled suddenly. "Mr. Fletcher! Men! You're here as witnesses the master's gone crazy! I'm taking over command for the sake o' the ship, the passengers and all hands. Do ye stand by me or not?"

"Aye!" exclaimed Fletcher. "We're with you!"

From the seamen broke quick assent. A sudden burst of smoke erupted from the open hatchway forward. Others of the crew appeared there, the third officer frantically calling all hands.

"Your last chance to avoid the charge of mutiny, Mister," said Wallace. "Make sail."

Cowles turned toward him. "All right, men. Come on, subdue him! I'm in command now, and—"

WALLACE took one pistol from his pocket as the mate approached, and deliberately shot him through the head. Cowles fell forward, and slid toward the scuppers. For a long moment there was stark staring silence.

"Mr. Fletcher!" Wallace brought out the other pistol. "Make sail. Everything but the royals, and brace around on the starboard tack. Lively, Mister—lively!"

Bluenose stood rooted, his face ghastly. Then he took a step backward.

"Aye, sir," he croaked. "Hands, aloft!"

The body of Cowles rolled and rolled as the ship came around, gathered into a lump and lay in the scuppers like a bundle of old clothes. Only then did Wallace see Jerry O'Dowd coming, with blackened stokers at his back, and he smiled grimly at the excited engineer. "Too late, Jerry," he said. "The game's played out now. Come on below."

FIFTEEN minutes later Wallace crawled from the hatchway, with O'Dowd close behind. He went directly aft to where Mr. Fletcher stood, and halted before the second officer.

"Mr. Fletcher, it was a smart trick to touch off a bale of cotton soaked in oil, eh? You're going into irons here and now, you and your friends among the men; but before you're laid up to answer to charges ashore, I'll give you my opinion of you."

Fletcher looked at his men, lifted his voice to them—but the third officer was among them with furious oaths, the black gang and O'Dowd were among them. And as Fletcher swung around, he was met by a crushing blow that sent him staggering and reeling back against the rail. He plunged forward, only to run into another that knocked him sprawling down the deck.

"Take him below, Jerry," and Captain Wallace felt his knuckles. "Too bad; they say it does take two good ones to put a Bluenose under, though. Better get down to your engines, Jerry—I'll be needing all you've got, pretty soon. Mr. Graham! You're acting mate now. Put those passengers below and keep 'em there."

Several protesting, obstreperous passengers were bundled back whence they had come; and the third officer, now mate, returned to salute Wallace briskly. From some of the men forward came a cheer, a ragged cheer that told its own story.

"Trouble's ended, sir!" Mr. Graham grinned happily.

"Just begun, rather." Wallace pointed to a heaving speck on the water. "Stand by with all hands, now."

"But sir—shall I have Mr. Cowles carried below?"

"Leave him where he is," said Wallace, "so he can see what it's like to be a ship's master. We'll bury him when we've less work on hand. Lively!"

And there was the first rescue of steam by steam in the long Atlantic lanes, and the work done by steam to boot. . . .

Old Cap'n Merriam ceased to speak, and stared down speculatively into his glass of good Demerara, and stirred it about meditatively as though he saw us not. Captain Rawlins waited for an instant, then emitted a snort and pawed at his red whiskers.

"Well?" he exploded. "Well? I don't believe a word of it. The work done by steam, ye say? Not wi' the best bronze propellers going! Not in any such sea! By steam?"

Old Cap'n Merriam looked up, and smiled faintly.

"They didn't have propellers in the eighteen-forties; they had side paddles," he said mildly. "And what's more, they had canvas on spars, and masters who knew tricks o' the sea that's forgot nowadays, Cap'n. How d'ye think Wallace sent a line aboard that disabled craft, eh?"

"That's what I'm asking you," snapped Rawlins in irritation.

"Why, he stood up to windward of the other ship and sent adrift a spar to carry a line. Then another spar, with a running bowline bent to the bight of the towline between the spars, and—"

"And the bowline on a bight acting as a lead for the bridle between 'em, of course!" burst out Rawlins. "Drifted the line-carrying spars down on each side of the derelict, sure. Any fool would know that!"

"And steam holding his ship steady," said Cap'n Merriam. "It took a good deal to be master back in those days, Cap'n—back before there were customs and ethics and whatnot. A man had to be a real master to deserve the name, then."

"WELL, that's what I claimed in the first place!" declared Captain Rawlins stoutly, and reached for the Demerara bottle. "Nowadays, what does it take to be a master in steam? Less'n nothing. Just a bunch of Hydrographic bulletins, weather reports by radio, automatic gyro-pilots and gyro-compasses, sonic sounding-machines and a lot o' other gadgets to turn with your thumb and finger. Harrumph! Here's to your health."

Cap'n Merriam only gave me a look and his gentle, wise old smile.

The next story in this much-discussed series goes inland—to the Mississippi. Watch for it in the forthcoming June issue.

Legionnaire Pro

In this lively novelette an American actor on vacation in Morocco borrows a Foreign Legion uniform—and finds he's played with fire.

By GEORGES SURDEZ

RICHARD LACEY was aware that the warped sense of humor of his friends was responsible for his misadventures in Morocco. But as he could never be certain of the precise point where events snapped beyond their control, he was to grow very puzzled when he sought for suitable retribution upon Travers and McGarron.

As a matter of fact, it had been Richard himself who had suggested a trip to North Africa. He remembered that late spring twilight in Paris, when he had paced the salon of the royal suite in a hotel beyond the means of contemporary kings. And he had been the only one of the three to complain then, the only one who suffered from boredom.

Travers was seeking material and photogenic young women for the silver-screen—not a dull occupation in the French capital,—while McGarron was engaged in justifying his membership in the I.B.F.O.W., International Bar Flies of the World.

"I don't want to see camels," McGarron had protested sadly. "Listen, Dick, there are a couple of swell zoos right in this town."

"Shouldn't think you'd want to investigate Africa," the practical Travers reminded tactlessly. "You did a sheik-and-sand pic two or three years back. The critics groaned; and the customers yawned. Think you can interest Consolidated in another 'Moon over Sahara'? Why, they didn't dare to keep dates in the cafeteria for months after the release."

Richard Lacey reacted like a thoroughbred horse who feels the spur. He straightened to his full height—six feet one inch for the fan magazines, and a good half-inch over five feet ten, in reality. His broad shoulders squared in the superbly draped tweeds. He informed them, who were grinning, that he was twenty-nine years old, a free man. What did it avail a man, he chal-

lenged, to earn five thousand bucks a week, if everything was as ashes on his palate? He needed rest, a change!

"Too, too bad!" McGarron clucked gloomily. "Our Handsome Dick is tired of fame and glory. Fed up with working for mere dough. In a few words, he wants to get away from it all!"

"You think you're funny!"

As Richard shrugged, indicating his nonchalance, his features subconsciously shaped, his muscles contracted, expressing the unswerving purpose of a strong man challenged. The others laughed.

"It's in an omelette, and it isn't eggs," McGarron stated.

Richard was a handsome young man, with a classic profile. But his beauty was not his whole fortune. As somebody had gushed, when he first loomed on the firmament: "Dick Lacey is the American youth, clean-cut, the type that a mother desires for her only daughter."

He had been "typed!" That had been his secret sorrow. He said bitterly that he was given no chance to act. His pictures had to start with his delivering the groceries, and to end when he vanished, one arm around his country sweetheart, behind a door marked: "Fourth Vice-President, Seas and Oceans Grocery Chain."

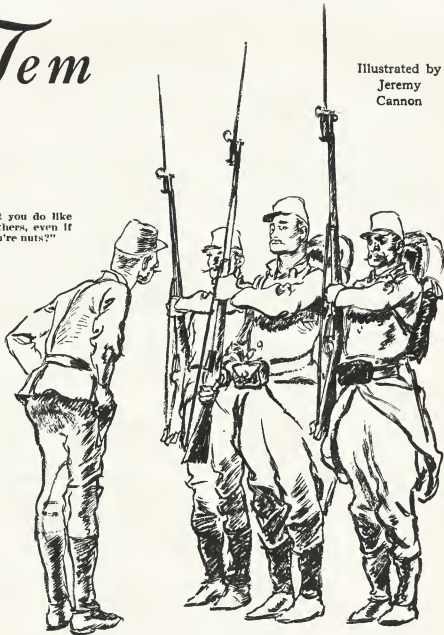
IN his six years' reign he had been allowed two tries: The Legionnaire in "Moon over Sahara," and the swash-buckling gentleman of fortune in "The Scarlet Cloak." Both had been super-super-productions, and each had cost at least a fourth of the published figures.

The more polite critics had said of the first that as a Legionnaire, Dick resembled the high-school fullback at a masquerade ball. The second had led to more vicious attacks: "Dick wields a rapier for six reels, with a superb clever-technique. Nevertheless he does not slice his bologna very thin." There had been worse things written: "A ferocious

Tem

Illustrated by
Jeremy
Cannon

"Can't you do like
the others, even if
you're nuts?"



leer as out of place on Handsome Dick's good-natured face as sideburns on a Kewpie doll."

Richard Lacey knew what was to blame: his press-agenting. His background was known—Middle West, soda-clerk, filling-station attendant, and stock-companies. No one had associated him with exotic settings or glamorous adventures. Perhaps he looked somewhat self-conscious in a costume rôle. But if the fools once knew that he had been in North Africa, perhaps—look at the idiots who had attained the reputation of adventurers by safety-first, high-priced expeditions for tigers and elephants!

"I'll go alone, then," he said shortly.

Richard did not think he would have to go alone, nor did he have to do so. Both his friends were very fond of him, if amused at his behavior. Where he went, they went.

And to North Africa he went. He refused to use his own car. Trains and buses would do, give him closer touch with people and events, he insisted. They roamed from Tunis to Biskra, to Algiers, to Oran, to Fez and Meknes, to Casablanca and Mogador. And Lacey was pursued by his fame. Other travelers forgot Moors, mosques and minarets to gape at him. He drew more attention



"I remembered a picture of yours, and I enlisted in the Legion. Boy, oh, boy!"

than the Kutubia, or the Tombs of the Sultans.

Then chance or a fortunate inspiration guided them to Ksar-Mejoula in the Middle Atlas. There local color had not been arranged by the Syndicate for Tourism, and in the savage panorama of stark hills, a small city of mud-brick dwellings huddled on the banks of a torrent. Even the modern touch of the military camp, pine-board barracks roofed with red tin in a rectangle of glittering barbed wire, struck an ominous note.

"This is something," Richard declared at once.

But deprived of a private bath, in a room bare of all accustomed comforts, he would have moved away quickly, back to tiles and running water, if McGarron had not started to complain loudly, chanting his regrets of the various bars he had encountered. Travers merely said that it reminded him of some towns in Nevada.

They entered a café near the Gunpowder Gate, late in the afternoon, and re-

ceived no more attention than was normally granted to prosperously dressed strangers. Tourists crowded so closely on the heels of the conquering troops in Morocco that they were accepted as a matter of course.

"YOU can't kick," McGarron proclaimed, after he and Travers had collaborated in educating the servant to the manufacture of a cocktail. "Here six hours, and not one request for an autograph." His round, sleek face lighted with a smile: "And some of the dames give me the eye up here, because nobody's told them you were handsome."

"That's business," Travers explained. He was considerably older than the other two, without illusion. "Nobody'll know you here, Handsome. They're not movie fans. They tell me they have a show here, when a lot of troops are in town, in this very place. Couple of months ago, they ran Charlie Chaplin's 'The Kid.' Strong and silent pictures. So, Dickie dear, six or seven years hence, when the rest of the universe has forgiven and forgotten you, return here and enjoy fame. Your pic's will be showing."

Richard waved a casual hand.

"Can it, Tommy, can it! This is too swell to spoil. Real—you don't get your local color in chunks. Bar might be anywhere—in France, in Belgium. No arcades, no camels sticking their mugs in the windows. The sets made it look phony, I always said. And I wish I'd seen those guys—"

He indicated a half-dozen soldiers of the Foreign Legion, near the zinc counter, exchanging banter with the fat serving-girl. They were dressed like American infantrymen, khaki blouses, breeches and rolled puttees; and the small red-and-blue képi, the broad blue sash wound under the leather belt, seemed incongruous touches. They were all rather young, clean-shaven, athletic in appearance, offering not a single bearded, thin adventurer with scars on his face.

"Dressed-up football players, uh?"

Richard grumbled.

"Still sore about that crack?" McGarron asked.

"Sure. Put felt hats and regular clothes on them, and see if they'd look any different from—"

"Americans?" some one near by asked.

"Sure. Are you?"

"No, I'm Hungarian." A Legionnaire who had entered a moment before stood near their table. He was tall and trim,

with a fine, smooth, pink face. "But I lived in New York for three years. I had got in illegal, see, and they pinched me and shipped me off. Going back when I'm through here. Say, gents, I'm no chiseler, see, but if you have any of those American cigarettes to spare—"

All three invited him to sit down and have a drink. He was given a couple of packages of cigarettes.

"They soak you six and seven francs a deck for real smokes," the soldier explained, "Can't afford them on our pay."

"How do you like it in the Legion?" Richard asked.

"It's all right most of the time."

"Want to ask your friends over for a drink?"

"I don't know anybody here. Just got in a couple of hours back. See, I just got out of the hospital in Meknès, and was shipped here by myself, transferred from my old outfit. That was the Fourth Regiment, which is southwest. Fell sick in Taroudant—that's in the desert, see? Reported at the camp and dropped my pack. I won't be here long, they tell me—the battalion I'm assigned to goes out tomorrow or the day after." The Legionnaire hesitated, then blurted out: "Maybe I shouldn't say this; but out here, a stranger's a sucker. I wouldn't be too friendly with most of those guys you see." He had been looking at Richard intently from time to time, and changed the subject: "Say, I keep thinking I've seen you somewhere, Mister. My name's Beratzky, Casimir Beratzky."

Travers performed the introductions.

"Lacey? Same as Dick Lacey?" Beratzky repeated. Then he laughed: "That's it, that's it! Say, you're to blame for my being here, in a way. When I went broke in Dieppe, I remembered a picture of yours, and enlisted in the Legion!" He laughed harder: "I got gypped, though! No cabaret girls, no harems with swimming-pools. And no stirrups on camels, either. And that part when you bawl out the major! Boy, oh, boy, they should have arrested you for—for—"

"Misrepresentation?" Travers helped him out.

"Right. Misrepresentation."

RICHARD'S face grew sullen. He was sensitive about "Moon over Sahara." It had done things to his increase in salary for a year. Then Beratzky, though perhaps unwittingly, poured soothing balm over his wounds.

"You were good, though. You acted like a regular guy, not like a dope-fiend or a nut." Beratzky waved his hands: "See what I mean? Like yourself just wearing a uniform, not like a drum-major dressed up for a parade."

Richard began to thaw visibly; surely this Legionnaire, who had lived the life depicted, would be a better judge than all the critics put together.

"What are you doing now? We're going to have dinner. Can you come too?"

BERATZKY was willing. They had dinner in the small dining-room of the hotel, and drank copiously. McGarron had met his match in the drinking of brandy. The four grew very friendly. Beratzky was educated, intelligent, observant; and he could back his picturesque yarns—he had been in two combats—with his military booklet. He had been cited for the Colonial Cross.

"How about going to some dive," McGarron suggested. "I don't mean a café, but—"

"There's nothing to see," Beratzky protested. "The booze they dish out in these dumps would poison you if you weren't used to it. Anyway, I've a pass until nine only."

They went up to Richard's room, and the Arab boy brought up more bottles, a small bucket of ice. Beratzky was presented with a new safety-razor, with more cigarettes, with soap, note-paper, stamps. But he balked at taking money.

"I'm no chiseler, you know!"

"We wouldn't miss it," Travers said.

And they promised Beratzky to help him get back into the States lawfully when he had the chance. They were having a splendid time. McGarron's lips moved silently, as always when he was ruminating an idea.

"Here's a gag!" he suggested at last: "Listen, Handsome, they put you on the pan for the way you acted a Legionnaire. Suppose you dress in Beratzky's clothes, and we go to some dive, and you get away with it? Travers can write up the stunt and shove it across somewhere."

"Eh?" Beratzky started up in alarm. "Nothing doing! I'd get eight days for lending my uniform!"

"What do you charge a day?" Travers asked. "That would be honest dough. But maybe they'd beat you—"

Beratzky laughed.

"I've been in nineteen months, and I never saw a man struck. You don't sock a guy who'll follow you with a gun in his

mitts. Say two bucks a day? Call it twenty, if you get caught."

McGarron gave him fifty, Travers twenty, Richard as much.

"You're crazy, fellows. No, no—"

"What the hell, Beratzky! Take it, Ratzy!"

"What would they do to me?" Richard wondered.

"Might fine you a hundred francs, four bucks. They know you're a crazy American; and at that, they like a gag as well as anybody. Just explain. Can you speak French?"

"Sure!" all three admitted in chorus.

They had never experienced trouble spending their money in alien lands.

"Probably, nobody'd do anything. If you happen to chance on a good sergeant, he wouldn't even report me. They like a drink, most of them." Beratzky, who had scouted the reserved quarter that afternoon, as his first care, sketched a map of the town. "This street. . . Skip the first three doors on the right. Dumps. Go into Number Six."

They had a few drinks to celebrate the venture. Beratzky's uniform fitted Richard fairly well, although the breeches were snug at the seat and knees.

"Better keep that képi on all you can," the Legionnaire advised. "Your hair's too long for regulations. Let's see you salute—you'll have to pass by officers. That's pretty good, but take it easy. Not too snappy, so as to call attention to yourself. Don't stick your hands in your pockets on the streets; some officers hate to see that. And hide that wrist-watch; some one might nab it. Where do you want me to wait?"

"Right here."

"You aint worried about me lifting—"

"Ratzy, don't be a sap!"

THEY left Beratzky with a full bottle, privileged to order as he liked. Richard was not drunk, but he was not sober. The idea struck him as superb, and he had never felt such an urge to give a magnificent performance. He marched ten yards ahead of his friends, and found it easy enough to imitate the strolling gait of other soldiers out to kill a few idle hours before roll-call.

His first test occurred in the full light of a café window. He passed two Legion officers. He quickened his stride a bit, as he saw others do, faced them and saluted. His heart was in his mouth, but the two returned his salute casually. A few privates stared at him curiously, but

Without a single question the matron in charge slapped a bottle of beer before the girl. "Seven-fifty," she said.



he figured out that it was because they did not recognize his face, rather than because there was anything out of the way in his appearance.

At each meeting his confidence grew. These chaps were not looking for an impersonation. They could not imagine why a civilian would wish to disguise himself as a soldier. At last he entered a house through a door on which was painted an immense Six. For an instant he paused in the doorway.

He saw a rather crowded, spacious room, furnished with heavy tables and benches. A zinc-covered bar was in an angle. And he did not have to break the ice himself, for a scantily clad Moorish girl grasped his arm and started talking. She led him to a corner, settled him on a bench. Without asking a single question, the heavy-footed matron in charge slapped a bottle of beer and a glass before the girl, a tall glass containing a pinkish fluid before Richard.

"Seven-fifty," she said. The girl picked up the two francs fifty centimes in change, and looked questioningly at her escort. Richard nodded.

He saw Travers and McGarron enter, receive much attention. Visiting tourists! A table was wiped clean for them, and two small bottles of champagne were placed before the two. The girls hesitated to approach them; then, encouraged by McGarron's grin, took courage, sat near by, ordered drinks after a pantomime to ascertain if the two would settle for them.

"Champagne!" the girl with Richard said, amazed. "Excuse me, baby; the fat one seems to like me."

She trotted off, and Richard shrugged bitterly. Between a private of the Legion earning some pennies each day, and a man who bought champagne, an intelligent girl could not hesitate; and he knew that McGarron had winked at his girl deliberately. He was not abandoned for long, however, for another Mooresque, darker and heavier, crowded onto the bench, and started to drink the beer.

He found no trouble conversing with her in broken French. It did not seem to matter whether they understood each

other's words. Before long, two Legionnaires stopped before his table, made expressive gestures toward their pockets: cleaned out. He gathered that they were asking him where he came from, and he motioned for them to sit down.

"Hospital—Meknès—"

One of them evidently did not know much more French than he did. Richard understood that he had only been in four months, had come with a draft from Algeria. As it did not occur to them to ask technical questions, Richard could not reveal his ignorance of the Legion. And a soldier instinctively trusts a man who buys him a drink. Moreover, they were pretty drunk, and content to interrupt each other as they narrated long, incoherent yarns, which he partially understood.

He gathered that Captain Cardoti, a Corsican officer, was a tough proposition, that one could not kid him easily. But he had a heart of purest gold, in reality. Captain Kermann, on the other hand, who had the Third Company, was a regular "cow," because he was an Alsatian, and he probably got graft on food, because his men fed badly.

"What about the captain of the First Company?" Richard asked, remembering it was the one into which Beratzky was to serve. He felt he had to show normal interest.

"Captain Mauclair—good guy. No trouble with him. Lieutenant Arnoux. Tough egg." The two alternated in their pointers: "Watch your rifle, friend. Arnoux'll be after you about it. But in that outfit, you can play sick easy—suckers for health."

RICHARD missed some words at this time, but was careful not to show it. As they drank the pink stuff, which he discovered was *tomate*, a mixture of anisette, grenadine and ice-water, they assured him that although in the Fourth Company, they had friends in the First, and would see that he got along.

"*Ya pas, t'es un vrai copain*—" the older one kept repeating, touched by the treats. "No use kicking; you're a real pal. We'll get somebody to steer you right. What are you? Hungarian, eh? They've three of them in the First. Watch them; they're crooks!"

Then some one started to play an accordion somewhere on the floor above, in one of the rooms. And the Legionnaires picked up the song, a slow, sentimental German ballad. By the second chorus

Richard could repeat the words. He had been trained to pronounce syllables, to repeat sounds. And he had a good voice. At least, his two pals told him so with extravagant gestures. They patted his shoulders, leaned close. They borrowed cigarettes, ordered fresh drinks.

They treated him as if they had campaigned with him five years. And although perhaps not disinterested, their friendship was genuine; they liked him. They never suspected that he was not one of them. The intimacy reigning in his group was so visible that he caught a gleam of amazement on the faces of his friends across the room.

"Wish they had a camera," Richard thought. "Nobody'll believe this." And he wondered what these two fellows would say if they knew the truth, that he earned more money than the entire company he was supposed to enter. Perhaps more than two companies! He would have to figure that out. And he drank thirstily. The girl had left, with a five-franc bill in her moist palm.

ONE of his new pals tried to juggle with a fork, missed, and that started table tricks. Richard drew a coin from under a glass without touching it. He worked stunts with a match-box, and enjoyed it as much as they did. He threw the contents of one glass into another, without spilling a drop. And he sang when the others sang. There was something contagious, attractive, in the simplicity of these fellows.

At last McGarron caught his eye and nodded toward the door. But Richard took a perverse pleasure in staying where he was, in "rubbing in" his success. He contemplated giving these two a large present, because he felt sorry for them: they would haunt the First Company endlessly, looking for him and his free drinks. It was, in a way, unfair to accustom them to easy living!

Unexpectedly there came a loud rapping at the massive door, and to Richard's amazement, his two friends started for the back of the establishment, beckoning for him to follow. A number of Legionnaires were vanishing. He rose, stood uncertainly, and while he was still hesitating, the door opened and several armed men came in.

They were led by a slim, raw-boned man with black mustaches and fierce little dark eyes, whose angular jaw was slashed by the leather chin-strap of his képi. While those with him guarded

the door, he approached the nearest Legionnaire, snapped a question.

The private produced papers, which the man,—who was a sergeant, Richard thought,—scanned quickly and returned. He continued his inspection, rapidly. Richard decided to bluff it out, and when the man had answered his salute, proffered the military booklet. The sergeant pushed it aside: "*Ca n'me regarde pas, ca! Voyons, votre permission?*"

Richard gathered that he was supposed to produce a pass. It was probably after nine o'clock. Time had flown. He tried to speak, found the words hard to locate and assemble; and while he stammered, the other grew impatient, declared that he was drunk, that he had no pass, and that one would see what one would see.

"Arrived today—Meknès—hospital—" Richard volunteered.

This aroused fury, a torrent of speech. Evidently an order had been given which Richard had missed, for the sergeant grasped his shoulder and pushed him toward the door. And when Richard hung back, a more vigorous shove, with the closed fist this time, propelled him three yards in one slide.

And all the time the slim man's dark mustache bristled, and a continuous stream of angry words issued from his throat. Two Legionnaires of the patrol slung their rifles and grasped Richard by the arms. When he undertook to shake himself free, their fingers tightened painfully, and one rubbed his knuckles against the base of his skull, speaking urgently in unintelligible French.

"*Allons, allons—pas d'ingeries. T'es noir, t'es saoul, mais fais pas l'—*"

THEN Richard played his ace, shouting that he was not a Legionnaire. This did not appear reasonable, and the sergeant motioned him to get on. Richard then shouted in English to Travers and McGarron, who were watching with broad smiles on their faces. He pointed to them, called the sergeant's attention.

"Well, what's the matter with them?" the noncom consented to ask. "What do you want to do, fight them? You should have thought of it earlier."

"My friends—I'm no Legionnaire—masquerade, masquerade!"

Richard was not at his best in explaining. His two guards were wrenching at his gesticulating arms until they seemed about to be jerked from his shoulders. By accident or otherwise, two or three attempts to still his shouting with the

palm of the hand had smacked across his nose and mouth. And when he tried to kick himself free, the result was immediate. A return kick almost cracked his shin.

"Be still," the sergeant snapped. He then addressed McGarron and Travers: "What's all this?"

"I really don't know, monsieur!" Travers protested, looking in puzzlement at Richard.

"You don't know him?"

"No." Travers looked at Richard intently. "I never saw him before. I'll ask my friend, who doesn't speak French. Maybe he knows what's the matter." And Travers said to McGarron: "What do you say, Mac? Think this will get him away from it all for a while?" Then, as McGarron started to laugh, he turned to the sergeant: "Monsieur, my friend is amused—he cannot imagine why this—this Zouave is angry with us—"

CUT the kidding, you dopes!" Richard shouted. But the palm smacked on his mouth again, and a heavy sole crashed on his toes. "Eh, ouch! Take it easy!"

"Maybe we'll get him back in the morning, eh, Mac?" Travers was saying. "And maybe we won't. Wouldn't spoil a chance to keep him away from autograph-albums, would you?"

"Never, never."

The two paid their bill and left.

Richard tried to shout after them; the sergeant spoke a few words; and suddenly, as if a spring had been released, the two privates set to work on him. They bounced him through the open door, picked him up as he sprawled, shook him. They were under the impression that he was rebellious, drunken, trying to make their unwelcome chore harder for them. When he tried to punch at the nearest one, in a fury of vengeance, a rifle-butt struck him in the pit of the stomach and took all the fight out of him.

He had coped with three and four men many times, in pictures; but these two found him very little trouble. Pick-and-shovel work, drill and marching, produce muscles as well as gymnasium exercise. They jostled and kicked him along minutes after he had decided to obey, herding him like a sheep. They swore at him, because they had suffered scratches.

Then they passed through a gap in barbed wire closing the open space between two walls, trotted him across an

immense stretch of sand, skirting rows of barracks. And finally they propelled him through a narrow door, into a totally dark chamber, where he stumbled over the prone bodies of other men. The door slammed.

The smell was sickening. He soon realized that most of the men crowded here in the darkness were drunks. But those who could move kicked at him when he stumbled over their limbs, and he soon sought the wall. There was no place to stretch out, and so he squatted against the partition, to keep out of the way. When he tried to speak, he was urged to shut up, and missiles were tossed in his direction.

He was silent then. After an endless stretch of time and discomfort, he must have dropped off to sleep. . . .

Formidable, inhuman, a voice roared; meaningless syllables cracked like breaking sticks within Richard's cranium. He was jostled and kicked, caught in a swirl of moving men, men moving toward a pale rectangle which was the open door. Day had not yet broken, and the uncertain light seemed an execution morning. At best he would have had a bad hang-over; as it was, he would have welcomed a merciful bullet through the skull.

There was seeming confusion all about him. A sergeant was barking. He was informing the men that no punishment would be given out, that all were to be ready to leave inside an hour. And those who had spent the night with Lacey in the lock-up scattered in various directions. The sergeant, having spoken his piece, turned away.

A LINE of uniformed men stood before a door, moving up in turn, extending a tin cup. It looked like coffee being poured out, and Richard wanted coffee, something hot. He took the end of the line, and when his turn came was sworn at because he did not have a cup. Fortunately he found coins in his pockets, offered them and was rewarded with an imposing mug filled to the brim.

The brew was weak, far too sweet, and only vaguely related to what he knew as coffee. But he swallowed it, then moved off determinedly, bound for the gateway, the outside world, freedom. He could not be far from the hotel. In another ten minutes he would be punching Travers and McGarron with considerable satisfaction.

A man stood in his way, bellowing. And as he tried to pass by, the flat of a

massive hand caught him on the breast-bone, knocked him back, stumbling and retching. Naturally—they had not realized their mistake; they thought that he really was a Legionnaire!

HE was showered with questions, and showed his—Beratzky's—military booklet. The sergeant who had halted him grasped his elbow, shook him, and pointed to another corner of the esplanade. Richard turned like a sheep and started off at a stroll. Another noncom, hustling by, shouted at him, pushed him into a faster gait. He came to another line of men, and when his turn came, was handed a bundle of equipment, cartridge-pouches, belts, sacks, bayonet and scabbard.

"Hey!" he called, in desperation. "Anybody here speak English?"

"Me," said a Legionnaire. "I speak."

He was a huge, sandy-haired man with a flat nose.

"Listen, help me out. I'll give you—" Richard fumbled in his pockets, found some bills, handed over two or three.

"Sure. I Pechler, I help good. Come on!" The big fellow urged him on with a kindly but firm hand: "I help much. Where you belong? What name?"

There was a confused explanation until Pechler, whose English was not too fluent, assured Richard that no name mattered here, save that on his military booklet, *Casimir Beratzky*. He led him into one of the buildings, located a pack bearing Beratzky's name and number. All the time Richard protested, asked for word to be sent to the hotel. But almost by main force Pechler was buckling belts on him, adjusting a canteen here, a bayonet there.

"You all right. You good fellow. No worry."

Richard could not make him understand the situation. They went into the yard again; and Pechler, who was fortunately a member of the First Company, led his charge to the gathering group. This nightmare would end soon, Richard trusted. Any moment now, Travers and McGarron would appear with Beratzky and clear up the situation. Would he be glad to see them!

But minutes went by, and his longing glances at the gateway revealed no one that he knew. Pechler had gone to his own group, some yards away. Richard left the line, walked toward a group of sergeants—he knew gold chevrons by that time—surrounding a lanky, flint-

faced man who was evidently an officer. The noncoms were surprised by his arrival, tried to shove him back. But he struggled until he stood before Lieutenant Arnoux.

"Monsieur—" he started.

Arnoux leaped as if he had stepped on a cobra. And in this assembly of loud-voiced men he was something of a champion. The beauty of his speech was lost on Richard, who understood hardly one word in twenty.

"*Monsieur!* I'll give you *Monsieur!* Shamming nutty, eh? Carrying a rifle like



Exclamations which he laid to shock at the sight of blood, were motivated in reality by the fact that he wore thin silk socks.

an umbrella. What the hell do they do in the training battalion? Sergeant, take his name and number. Four days, four days, by all that's sacred! And get rid of that idiot. I don't want to see his inane mug! Who's his sergeant?"

"I am, *mon Lieutenant*. New man, came up alone from Meknès—out of the hospital, *Lieutenant*."

"Playing the fool! Get him away."

Richard tried to protest, but the sergeant hustled him back into line, shoving him along step by step, cursing.

"If you move a millimeter until the order's given, you swine, I swear I'll smack you in the puss!" And the sergeant gathered an impressive fist under Richard's nose. "Cut out the clowning!"

Pechler shouted over: "No move, no move!"

The excitement all around appeared on the increase. Squads of men ran to and fro; bugles resounded. There was all the bustle unavoidable when eight hundred odd men take the field in formation, for a period of months. Then the lines stiffened as other orders were shouted. Again the sergeant came charging upon Richard, jerked his rifle upward: "Shoulder arms! Can't you do like the others, even if you're nuts?"

Richard shouldered arms, and felt very foolish. When Travers and McGarron—"Arrrahooo-ficks! Rrrtey arr—"

Garde à vous, fixe! Presentez armes! was the meaning of the inarticulate roar. Richard did not comprehend the words, but he imitated the others. Suddenly a group of officers was before him; and a

rather short, obese gentleman, with puffy lips and a short, clipped gray mustache, was eying him with mingled fury and amusement; this was the battalion commander.

Then he turned to a youngish, graceful man at his side, Captain Maclair, and indicated Richard: "My compliments, Captain."

Maclair spoke to the sergeant, who gave his explanation once more: "New man—hospital—Meknès—"

Then he spoke to Richard directly, in a restrained voice, although he was red to the eyeballs, ashamed. And when Richard did not react, he took his hand from around the trigger-guard, lowered it to support the butt. Then he jerked up the left arm a bit, corrected the angle of the palm.

"Touching, very touching," the Major grumbled humorously. "But really, the ground-work should be done before they get up here. Not well shaved, either. I like a man with a beard or without a beard. The in-between stages look sloppy." He added gently: "Curious haircut—lift his képi, Sergeant. Ah." He looked at the hair, which had caused sighs from a million feminine breasts, with something akin to disgust. "Too long, and upon my word, oily! We can't delay the battalion's departure. But at the first opportunity, see that he is trimmed up a bit. If he is a Legionnaire, I'm a cobbler."

The Major, having had his say, passed on at last. But all the faces turned toward Richard were aglow with something that was far from love. A man's appearance concerns his group, his section, his company. Richard had spoiled the show.

"You've got four days more from the Captain," the sergeant announced with concentrated rage. "That's eight. If you get off latrines-fatigue inside a fortnight, I'm as crazy as you look!"

BATTERED, baffled, Richard hardly dared breathe. These men would not kill him, probably, but they would rough him up more. His whole body already ached from shoves and prods. If he ever got out of this mess, he would complain, ask for reprisals. But he'd be laughed at, probably. He had worn the uniform!

Orders—loud, incoherent orders. And the shrill squeal of fifes, the blaring of bugles, the rhythmic throbbing of drums. He started to march—to march with the

Foreign Legion. He passed through the gateway, turned right, with the rest. The road skirted the town. Surely, McGarron and Travers would be there to stop this nonsense. But they were not.

A hundred yards, another hundred, the third hundred.

"Baam, ba-da-da-ba-am!" the music crashed cheerfully. He had marched to this tune before, when he had sweated and slaved under direction some miles out from Palms Spring, California; and the notes stirred a tremendous homesickness in him. This would not last, he sought to console himself. He was important; he would be missed! His secretary, left in Paris, was used to his telegram every other day. He would worry.

He thought of making a break, out-distancing the others to the hotel. But the sergeant appeared to have read his mind; he dropped back, glared at him. Why, if this man grew angrier, Richard felt, he might go so far as to shoot him!

AFTER a long space, a whistle blew. The troopers broke ranks and sat down, lighting cigarettes. Richard saw the officers gathered some distance away, those mounted hooking one leg over the saddle. They all looked like rather intelligent, kindly fellows. He started toward them.

"Beratzky! Damn you!"

The sergeant—his sergeant—his corporal and a private all collared him at one time. Ah, no! He was going to make no more trouble for that day! He'd done enough—caused the Major to laugh at Captain Maclair and the whole company! They were so earnest about it that he sprawled on his back, and had to collect parts of his equipment. When he had retrieved his property, the whistle was shrilling for the march to resume.

He turned his head; the town was lost to view already, behind a rise of ground. Around him stark hills and rough men; under his feet the pebbly trail slashing this immensity.

"Keep them up," the man behind him advised, poking him hard; he was wearying of catching Richard's heel with his toe every few steps. And the men flanking him shouldered him back when he swayed too far. Marching in formation is an acquired talent.

Richard's loins began to ache from the tug of the belt and pouches; his back itched annoyingly. The sweat blinded him. And the massive boots suddenly seemed filled with slim, sharp needles.

He had, hitherto, considered his body as a whole. Now it was divided into component parts that hurt him in turn, with sharp twinges that tore up his thigh muscles, circled his groin like a flash of fire, ended in a breathless, exquisite pang somewhere below his ribs.

The straps chafed his shoulders. The canvas support of a bag worked over his *capote* collar against his neck, abrading it. And the rifle grew larger, thicker, heavier, burned his palms, yanked at his arms, reminded him of its presence in fifty separate and unpleasant ways. That rifle! It was animated, had a vicious soul of its own. If he slung it, the butt knocked against his side. If he trailed it, he tripped on it. From time to time, as he changed his grip, it would smack him in the face.

Whistle—halt.

He squatted wearily. He felt that he had been marching endlessly. As a matter of fact, he had walked exactly one hundred minutes, two fifty-minute periods. This was the second hourly halt. Distance covered: five or six miles. Not a long way, when one walks swinging the arms, but quite a stretch with an unaccustomed burden. . . .

Whistle—march.

The first few strides were torture, the rest were easier. Onward he walked and walked. Men were singing all around him. They exchanged jokes. They found strength and courage for casual pranks on one another. Some flicked little pebbles at backs of their comrades' heads, howling with glee when an ear was struck. . . .

Whistle—march. . . .

Richard plodded, feeling as low-slung as a turtle. His feet sank into the trail, he felt, to the ankle; and his legs were driven up into his abdomen, to meet his collapsing lungs.

Whistle—stop!

HE sank where the signal found him. At the end of an unbelievably short time rough hands yanked him erect, a red face was close to his own, spouting words. He was afraid to drop out, afraid of what might happen. Had he not heard somewhere that they shot stragglers? These guys did not look like murderers, but one could never tell! Travers, McGarron! Wait—

Whistle—stop!

He dropped again. This time, he could never rise! But he was scarcely seated until he was jostled, shouted at. It was

the noon halt, and he was presumed to go and gather firewood. It was not only his duty but his special task as a punished man, a chap with eight days hanging over him. He straightened, groaned, sat down again, pointing to his feet.

The sergeant squatted at his side, squeezed the boots.

"Take them off," he said. And he gestured to make his meaning understood. Richard obeyed, and as he had guessed, his shoes were bloodied. He heard exclamations of amazement, which he laid to shock at the sight of blood, but which were motivated in reality by the fact that he wore socks, thin silk socks, instead of the bandages.

The noncom galloped off, brought back Lieutenant Arnoux; and a moment later, Captain Maclair was present also. They saw some justification in the claim he advanced now, that he was not a Legionnaire. No Legionnaire would wear such things on his feet for a march.

THE Captain spoke a few words of English learned in school, and Pechler was called upon for help. The pharmacist-sergeant, who came to look at his feet, gave his opinion: This man's soles were soft; he was not accustomed to march. Richard showed his shorts, of striped silk, a most unmilitary garment.

"Richard Lacey?" The name did not mean anything to these men. Their work was in remote spots of North Africa, and when they were on leave, they preferred all girls-and-music entertainments. "All right. We'll communicate with battalion headquarters in town, and ascertain whether anyone's missing."

"You'll send a messenger? How long will that take?"

Captain Maclair looked at him suspiciously.

"You won't gain much time if you are lying, my friend. We'll use optical signals. Heliograph." He turned to the waiting sergeant: "Exempted from fatigues until further notice."

Richard had become a center of curiosity. Men stood near, watching him as he ate stew, drank wine. His feet still ached, but the salve applied had been soothing, and it was exquisite enjoyment to wiggle his toes freed from their stiff leather prison.

Within a short time an apology would be forthcoming. And he would wave it aside. Perhaps, if drink could be bought in the field, he would invite the officers to kill a couple of quarts. He would be



Richard, trained to leap to the rescue as if he meant it, collided hard with the nearest Moroccan.

a good sport about this business. He would not even betray to McGarron and Travers that he had been angry.

This was very funny, when one could think about it calmly. The Legionnaires, from major down, were justified in resenting his clumsiness. He remembered that he had been furious at unlucky extras who had ruined scenes through ignorance or overeagerness. A professional was always annoyed by an amateur.

He lighted a cigarette, relaxed.

Then he saw Lieutenant Arnoux coming toward him, and looked up with a friendly smile. But the sergeant knew the officer better, and after one glance at his face, yanked at Richard's shoulder: "Come to attention, you tramp!"

EVERYONE was angry at Richard again. Arnoux shook as he spoke, like a motorbike on a corduroy road. His voice cracked like a whip; the pseudo-Legionnaire was almost happy at that second not to understand clearly. It seemed that one had to accept criticism in any line of endeavor!

Pechler came after the officer had left, and translated unbelievable news: The military authorities had consulted the civil police, who had questioned people at the hotel. Monsieur Richard Lacey had stayed there for the night, it was true, but he was not missing. His two

companions, having luncheon in the dining-room, had declared that he had left on the morning bus, for Meknès. They themselves were to take the afternoon car.

Certainly they knew the Legionnaire Beratzky, had spoken to him on the preceding evening. They had given him drink, money and sundry articles of clothing. In answer to a question as to whether Beratzky had stolen garments, they had declared that anything he had was his, with their compliments. As a matter of fact, those merry fellows had stated that they were telling the entire Legion that they loved Legionnaire Beratzky like a brother.

"The Lieutenant says you'll be punished for all this," Pechler concluded. "You've been reported to the Major."

Whistles, orders, bustle.

"Get those boots on," the sergeant ordered.

But even the noncom soon realized that the undertaking was doomed to failure, even when Legionnaires attempted it. Richard's feet had taken advantage of their temporary freedom to dilate and spread. The broken blisters had left raw patches. Captain Maclair rode up to the group surrounding the actor, and leaned from the saddle to have a look.

"Exempt, wagon!" he snapped.



Richard was not executed for falling out on a march. He waited by the side of the road until the battalion's carts rolled by, and was helped onto one of them.

He was dazed and meek by that time. He was tempted to believe that he was indeed Casimir Beratzky, gone mad.

His friends' treason bewildered him. They were not cruel fellows; they liked him. Why had they denied that he was missing? And what had become of Beratzky? Perhaps they could not realize what he was undergoing, how much physical suffering their joke had caused. How long would they keep it up? . . . Thirty days, perhaps! Because they could send telegrams to his secretary.

He fumbled in all his pockets. The sum he had taken along had been trifling to him, but it was large for the Legion. He ingratiated himself with the driver with a sizable gift. As a paying passenger, a sort of cradle was made for him among the bales and boxes in the cart. Five francs got him a bucket of wine.

When most of the liquid had been transferred to his stomach, he grew sleepy, and dozed off, rocked by the leisurely pace of the team of mules.

FOUR days later, Richard Lacey, with a secretary in Paris, a private mansion in California, and for whom fan letters were accumulating at the rate of hundreds each day, was performing his first

trick of guard duty, on the wall of an isolated blockhouse deep in the Middle Atlas.

The battalion had detached twenty-four men into the small structure, to hold it securely during the opening operations. Richard had been assigned according to normal routine: His feet were in poor condition, and the comparatively quiet existence would give them time to toughen. His chief at Number Seven Blockhouse was a senior noncom, Blaize, an *adjudant*. Most men of that rank are veterans of many years of service. Blaize had climbed quickly, aiming for a commission. He was twenty-five.

Probably that fact counted heavily toward Lacey's happiness. Blaize was studying English—his foreign language for the coming exams; and when he discovered some one in the detachment who spoke it well, he was overjoyed. He had a dictionary, a grammar, a manual for conversation, a special booklet for military subjects. With all of these, and putting in writing things that they could not speak with ease, the two got on famously.

"Forget the punishments," Blaize conveyed in their long conferences. "You are serving them officially. You appear like an intelligent fellow. Your—" The dictionary was consulted several minutes for this one. "—Your hoax will be forgiven. I will help you."

Richard undertook to narrate his adventure. Blaize said doubtfully: "You

have not the features for the cinematograph-screen. You—"The *adjutant* laughed, looked up the word: "—You possess a very ill-looking maw."

A glance into the mirror almost convinced Richard that he suffered from delusions of grandeur. He had been forced to go to the barber, and the Legionnaire assigned to the task had clipped his hair one inch long all over his skull, shaved the back of his neck and his temples very far up. Somehow this coarsened his face; and what with the new sunburn, the bruises and the swelling, he appeared a very tough customer. His finger-nails had broken off; his palms were raw; and the unaccustomed exercise, the strange diet, had caused him to lose much weight, so that his neck seemed long and thin. The breeches, which had been too snug, now fitted him loosely.

"Could you communicate with America or Paris on the telegraph?" Richard urged. "I can prove what I am saying."

"Military telegraph," Blaize pointed out. "Penalty for private use. No, no, Beratzky. You remain here and teach me more English. I'll make you a present at the end of the month. Say, twenty francs?"

Richard nodded.

DURING his leisure hours, he wandered about in the outpost seeking for some one who knew the real Beratzky. But the Legion comprises between twenty-five and thirty thousand men, divided into six regiments; and a man who is transferred does not always find old acquaintances. Pechler, who had been assigned to the detachment also, frankly disbelieved him.

"Drop it, drop it," he would advise. "Look, moving-picture man is important person. If he missing, police look for him, cable, telegraph, write. Your friends are not crazy men. They do not hide Beratzky, because it is criminal offense to help deserter. Beratzky would be arrested. Our battalion would be notified. See?"

They all doubted him, but they all appeared to like him. He could sing and he could do tricks. As for the manual of arms, two hours of special drill a morning was bringing him up to standard. He picked up such things easily, for it was his profession to do so. And he could shoot very well, after he grew familiar with the military rifle.

On the third afternoon he saw a man stretched on a cot in barracks, reading a

Paris magazine. And the face of Marion Brooks, leading lady in his last picture, was spread on the back page. Surging hope left him weak, and he asked for a look. Sure enough, there were stills from the picture inside, three of them showing Richard Lacey—in a bathing-suit, in a dress-suit, in overalls.

He borrowed the magazine and doubled to Blaize's quarters. The *adjutant* looked at the photographs critically, asked Richard to stand this way and that way, compared the full-faces, the profiles.

"I should kick you," he concluded. "Why, that guy's handsome! Scram, Beratzky."

That same night a Legionnaire picked a fight with Richard, by twitting him on his simulated insanity. Richard did what he had done a hundred times, swung for the jaw in quick, lively resentment of a slight. And he connected, too. But the fellow, not being paid to roll over and play dead, merely shook his head, in a sort of sneeze, and punched back.

Richard had a good trainer, and had exercised faithfully. The other man, somewhat smaller and lighter, was hard and willing. It was a very pretty fight as such affairs are judged. What the Legionnaire lacked in science he made up in spirit. When kind comrades called a halt, separated them, Richard was winded, and bruised in the sides, but he derived an almost ineffable delight in watching the other's eye dilate in a pretty mauve aura.

That was his own handiwork, done on the level. He treated the whole dormitory to wine. And he spent the remaining time before turning in, learning words and tune of a Russian song, from a chap who played the mouth-organ like an angel out of heaven.

ON the fourth day, as stated, he was on sentry duty, pacing along the defensive wall, rifle sloped across his right shoulder, rather enjoying himself. The hills rose all about, green and brown, laced by the gleaming surface of mountain streams. In thickets which formed dark patches of vegetation on the slopes lurked armed men who hated him, because of his uniform. He was responsible for twenty-odd lives. And he had just learned that he was drawing Moroccan pay, campaign rate; each setting sun saw him richer by some nine cents!

Inevitably, as soon as he grew somewhat resigned to his fate, contented with his lot, something happened. A Legion-

naire, carrying a bayoneted rifle, strode up the incline: "Eh, Ratzy—I'm relieving you, Double to the *adjutant's* office at once."

"Another English lesson," Richard grumbled. He was wearying of explaining why *through*, *though* and *thought* were not alike, why the first was pronounced like *threw*. Even at seventy-five cents a month, that was hard work.

HE entered, came to attention, presented arms. He could do it well now, and looked for a glance of appreciation. But Blaize seemed embarrassed.

"Sit down! Stick that gun in a corner. Read this."

"*This*" was an official telegram, addressed to the commander of Blockhouse Number Seven, instructing that official to exempt the individual known as Beratzky, Casimir, First-class Legionnaire, from all duties, fatigues, chores, to assure his comfort until further instructions should be forthcoming concerning his transportation back to civilization. That gentleman, the message resumed, was to be treated with consideration, allowed any privilege he asked for. He was to be informed, also, that upon the complaint of Messieurs Travers and McGarron, Casimir Beratzky had been arrested in Mogador, trying to board a ship to Italy.

"You see?" Blaize said. "I am sorry about—"

"Oh, that's all right, *mon adjutant*!" Richard protested quickly.

"I'm not your *adjutant*, monsieur!" Blaize shrugged, wiped his forehead: "Oh, it came just in time, just in time! You see, my friend, I was going on a reconnoitering patrol this afternoon—suspicious gathering in the woods—and had you slated to come along. Suppose you had been hurt? Or killed! What trouble, what trouble! But admit your story sounded fantastic?"

"Readily, *mon adjutant*!" Richard agreed. Then something perverse took hold of him. There was one way in which he could make this chap pay for not believing him: "I understand from that note that you are to grant me privileges."

"Yes, of course. You can sleep in private quarters, eat with me or by yourself. Suggest what you wish."

"I wish to go on that patrol."

"Impossible. There may be shooting."

"What do you think I'm going for? Look here, I've done everything except fight, in this outfit. I'd like to see—"

"You don't comprehend. Combat is a serious matter." Blaize shook his head: "No, it's too great a responsibility for me to assume."

"But you have orders to let me do what I wish."

"True. But who would believe you wished this, in case—"

"I'll put it in writing."

"I suppose that would clear things. The Government could not be blamed."

"Write it for me in French, won't you?"

"Write it in English, Monsieur Lacey. If needed, a translation could be made. Please say that I advised you against it, that you clear everyone of all responsibility."

Richard wrote a first draft, corrected it according to suggestions from Blaize. It was a complete release for France, the Third Republic, the Ministry of War, the Legion, and Adjutant Blaize, in the event that Richard was damaged.

Naturally, all of this was borrowing trouble, Richard thought. In all probability not a shot would be fired. But he could always claim to have been in action with the Legion, because a patrol in this zone could be called actual service. And he would be one of a dozen men, so that even in case a few shots were aimed in their direction, all chances were against his being hit.

"Now, about changing your quarters—" Blaize started.

"Don't. Matter of fact,"—Richard shrugged casually,—"I'd like it better if you told no one in advance. Some of the guys would get respectful, and some would be twice as likely to try to knock my head off. When I get the chance to leave here, I want to do it quickly and quietly."

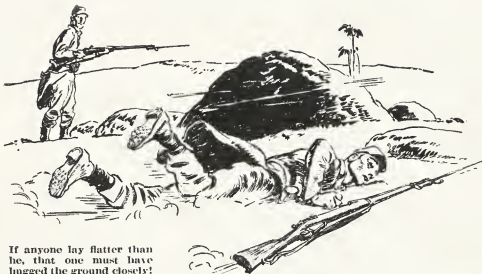
"As you wish." Blaize was eying Richard in amazement. "Say, how much do you really earn a year—in francs?"

"Something over six million francs, *mon adjutant*."

"I'm going crazy," Blaize muttered. "Dismissed! I mean, you may do what you like from now on."

THIS situation was to Richard's liking. He took up the English manual: "If you're not busy, Adjutant, we can go over this list again—remember, *th* should not be considered as two letters, but as one. Place the tip of the tongue against the upper front teeth—"

And the lesson proceeded, with Blaize sweating because he had promised Rich-



If anyone lay flatter than he, that one must have hugged the ground closely!

ard twenty francs a month for his spare time.

"*De Tames iz a riveh floying troo London*—" he started.

THE late spring sun beat down hotly. The twelve Legionnaires formed a skirmish line across the slope, strolling up toward the wood in which a scouting plane had seen suspicious activity. Suddenly Richard noticed that with the *adjudant*, who was in the center and some yards ahead, they were thirteen! He tried to laugh at this superstition.

He had a very good rifle in his hands, a Lébel with a full magazine and a cartridge in the chamber. And he felt very adventurous. But the attitude of those around him was contagious, and they behaved as if this were serious: the glances they sent toward the thick brush were keen, intent. Pechler, on his right, was swallowing hard; and Richard could see the bulge of his neck as he did so. And most of them had been in action before, knew what this was all about, had developed a sixth sense, which sixth sense was functioning at this precise moment, evidently.

He had been foolish to come. It was not his job. Suppose some one did pick him out as a target, and spilled his brain on his coat? It would be tragic to those who knew him, but hundreds and thousands would experience a certain amusement at a yearning on his part to play the hero. They would never think that he had yielded to private, personal curiosity and had done what any young man, thrown among other young men, would have done—refused to duck danger.

For he realized now what had impelled him to volunteer for this job: he had

worried over the opinion of these twenty-odd men, who might have thought he had felt relief at being spared. He had wanted to prove himself a man to these chaps, whom he would never see again, who led obscure, hard, dangerous lives, while he existed in luxury and glamour. Their opinion had counted. Why not? He was as much a man as they were men.

And he knew he had no more to lose. When a man is killed, it doesn't matter whether he has a million in the bank, or thirty cents in his pockets: He's dead. They enjoyed living as much as he did—they had their luxuries, their necessities, their hates and their loves. In some ways they were happier. And by God, he did not feel himself to be above them! On the average, they were as intelligent, as educated. One or two were handsomer, if not photogenic types.

But they had no more courage than he had, no more! Queer, almost mad ideas swirled in his head as he felt their tension grow. They were doing their job, doing what they had trained for. Suppose there were publications devoted to them, with critics?

"*The combat group under Adjudant Blaize overdid things. Showed a nervousness during that routine operation that would have been out of place in the Argonne drive! The direction—*"

BLAIZE had stopped short.

He was scanning the trees and the bushes. Had he seen a sign of life; had something moved? The whole detachment had halted with him. There was no sound, save the gentle gusts of the hill wind through the leafage, and the creak of a rifle-strap as a man shifted his grip.

But there was more suspense in this stillness than in the most melodramatic scene.

To Richard, this grew unreal, fantastic, this oozing dread so close, that pervaded him with the rest, seeped into his brain, seeking to kindle panic. It was so stupid, too: by turning his head, he would see the walls of the blockhouse, perhaps, despite the distance, the glitter of field-glasses in the hands of a watching sergeant. Looking the other way, he would spot Blockhouse Number Six.

His mouth felt dry, and he uncorked his canteen, took a long swig of the lukewarm water. From the corner of his eye, he saw the others start at his gesture, as if he had been menacing them.

"Nothing," Blaize announced loudly. "Come on, let's go back."

The Legionnaires turned around, but kept in open order. There was no talking; they were still uneasy. Pechler's eyes were frightened, fearful.

"What's the matter?" Richard asked him.

"Careful, be careful! People in woods."

"What are we going away for, then?"

"Many. Too many." Pechler came nearer and whispered an explanation in broken English: Had he not noticed all those fresh traces near the bushes? The men who had left them could not be very far. Adjutant Blaize would not enter the thicket with so few men, where he might be surrounded.

He was pretending to have seen nothing, in the hope that *they* would permit this small detachment to leave quietly and wait for bigger game, a passing supply-convoy, for instance. But he had moved his carbine according to a prearranged signal, and the watchers on the machine-gun platforms of the blockhouses had seen. By this time, the telegraph had worked, and measures were being taken to surround and trap the fellows lurking behind.

"Don't look back," Pechler urged.

One of the Legionnaires was whistling between his teeth, and Richard identified it as an American jazz tune. That brought back other scenes sharply: a luxurious night-club in New York, the night of his departure, women in clinging gowns, the radio playing in a car as he hurtled across town, over streets slippery from a March drizzle. California—and the waiting-room at an airport in Kansas! Would he ever—

"Hell with it," he thought. He was not afraid. Not as afraid as when the

police had phoned him that he had been the intended victim of a kidnapping. There was danger everywhere, if it was your luck to strike it.

But he distinctly felt gun-muzzles aimed at his back—and his shoulders, his torso, seemed to distend enormously, to spread into a coaxing target. He derived a shameful sense of comfort from the thought that Blaize would be aimed at first, being the chief, then all those who wore chevrons, then such big, outstanding targets as Pechler. A sensible Moroccan would react to a hunter's instinct, aspire to shoot the most important, and the largest.

Six million francs a year! Fortunately, those chaps did not know. For once in his career, Richard reveled in his obscurity.

"Zazzin-ing—tack—oh!"

The Legionnaires had whirled and fallen prone with the slurring sound of the bullet through the air, before the slapping of the detonation. Richard was sure of that, because he had dropped as rapidly as he could, yet he had an impression that he had remained erect long after the others. But if any one of them lay flatter against the soil than he, that one must have hugged the ground very closely.

"Steady," Blaize called. "Watch your range. Fire at will with rifles. Automatic at my orders."

SHOTS came oftener from the woods now, but Richard could see nothing, not even the flashes. Nevertheless, he pushed his rifle forward, squinted along the sights: "Eh, Pechler?" He turned his head. "What's the range?"

"Three hundred."

Richard adjusted the back sight, and waited. After some seconds he saw a flash, low down under brush. Then something moved, cutting off tiny shafts of light between the twigs. He pressed the trigger, and saw his point of impact, a few feet short. He reloaded with a twist of the wrist, fired again.

And for some five minutes, that was his occupation. As there was no one to call out the hits, he could not know whether he was being useful. Then the automatic rifle started to shoot, and it was interesting to behold the lashing of branches out there where the bullets struck.

"Riflemen, back!" Blaize ordered.

Eight men rose and raced away. Richard, obeying Pechler's yell, imitated them, and sank to the ground twenty or thirty

yards farther down. Then, protected by the riflemen's fire, the automatic and its crew retreated. Blaize dropped on his stomach beside Richard.

"Keep running farther each time, get away," he advised. "You remember the road down there—you'd be safe if you kept bent over. Make for the block-house. When you get into sight again, you'll be out of good range, seven or eight hundred yards away. I don't want you here in case they rush."

Richard shook his head.

"I think I'm safer here."

"No. See, you keep running after the others—those who are shooting shift their aim when the first men take cover, thinking all will do the same. You can gain ten, fifteen meters each time, and soon they prefer nearer targets. I should not have brought you."

Richard grinned ruefully.

"You said something that time."

He intended to follow the suggestion, but when he saw the rest slide to the ground, after the following rush back, he instinctively imitated them. He was excited and tense, and the smell of powder was on his hands. Like his companions, he was now too occupied to feel much fear.

There was more to do now, also. The mountain snipers had come to the very edge of the woods to shoot, and one could spot them oftener. But there was a queer, impersonal quality in the whole business, for Richard. He could not quite think of those remote, active silhouettes as human beings.

BLAIZE ordered his retreat skillfully, gaining three hundred additional yards without serious injury to anyone on his side. Because it was so well done, it seemed easy. But Richard realized that the orders were not called at random.

After one of the rushes, Blaize sought Richard again.

"We're far enough so that you have a good chance. Keep going the next time, going toward the left, by those rocks." He indicated a heap of boulders. "Get to the road and away."

"I'd sooner stick with the bunch."

"As you wish." But Blaize was pleased with him, for his hand came down in a quick, hard slap on Richard's back. "Too bad you've got such a good job, old man. You'd make a good soldier."

Richard smiled. Probably that fine fellow did not altogether understand that

he was somewhat afraid of running alone. He mistook caution for loyalty.

One of the Legionnaires, Davoust, yelled suddenly. One of the missiles grazing the blades of grass had struck a pebble, ricocheted and smashed against his cheek. To Richard, it appeared as if the whole lower part of his face had been knocked off. Richard shuddered—such a wound would hurt him as much as death.

"Stop yelling and scram!" cried Blaize.

Davoust did not wait for another invitation. He was on his feet and racing toward the road instantly, his left hand cupped over his mangled cheek, spattering blood as he went. Richard saw him go, saw that he was not hit. But he was himself in the prey of a new terror: disfiguration!

What had happened to Davoust would have wrecked Richard's career.

"Go on, back!" the *adjutant* called.

THIS time the whole patrol rose and galloped down toward the road. Regardless of legend, it takes a fair marksman indeed to strike a moving target at a third of a mile.

The next incidents came in such close succession that Richard could not isolate them until later. As Davoust, some forty yards in the lead, passed the heap of boulders on his way to the sunken road, a half-dozen shots crackled. The Legionnaire fell.

Adjutant Blaize obliques toward him, with Richard and some others following. There were a few ugly-looking, bearded, more-than-half-naked men about, shooting and shouting. Blaize stumbled, fell and rolled over two or three times, his carbine clattering aside.

Blaize had no more than dropped, when two men pounced upon him. And Richard, without thinking, pounced upon them. That seemed the natural thing to do; Blaize was on his side; he knew him. Perhaps he might have thought of the safety offered by the road, ten or fifteen seconds away at the pace he had been setting. But he had no time to think.

In an emergency, a man will subconsciously act according to his early training. And Richard had been trained to leap to the rescue as if he meant it.

He took off perhaps eight feet from the nearest Moroccan, bayonet leveled, aimed. And he missed, naturally, but collided hard, tumbling down all in a heap, bringing the second hillman into

play with a brilliant if unstudied and unplanned shoulder block.

The wind was knocked out of him, and he might have been satisfied to rest. But one of the others, more accustomed to making the most of such opportunities, reached for his head to get a grip and steady it for a throat-jab with the blade. One of his fingers, feeling for Richard's eye, turned into a claw. Richard Lacey tossed sportsmanship to the winds, and bit. It was not a make-believe bite, but a serious, businesslike clamping of the jaws. The little finger between his teeth crunched.

Then he arched his back, scrambled to his feet, fought as well as he knew how. His left eye was aching, half-blinded, and he was as furious as a cat with its tail caught in a gate. He never could remember clearly just how he came to be standing in the road, with Blaize in his arms. Blaize insisted that Richard had picked him up to carry him away. Richard did not argue about it, but believed that he had been trying to strangle Blaize as an enemy.

The embankment of the road formed a natural trench, and the patrol stopped there, waiting for help. That did not take long to arrive, as a half-squadron of Spahis had started from a Principal Post twelve miles up the valley at the same time as the Legion patrol from Number Seven, to investigate the same suspicious gathering. *Goumiers* from neighboring villages, a sort of native militia, had been called out also, armed with their old *chassepots* and *gras*, and ancient sabre-bayonets which could do the work of new steel.

One of the cavalry lieutenants spoke excellent English, acquired at Trinity College; he informed Richard that the *adjutant* spoke in the highest terms of his conduct. "What puzzles me, old chap," he added, "is his telling me you're masquerading, not really in the service, you know! You could get into a serious mix-up doing it, eh what?"

"Got a mirror?" Richard challenged.

"Er—what? A mirror?"

"A mirror, yes!" Richard gestured madly. "I want to look at my face!"

REUNION in Ksar-Mejoula!

In a spacious room ordinarily used for courts-martial, a dozen men were gathered, including the Lieutenant-colonel commanding the garrison. The revelation of Richard Lacey's identity had produced officers who spoke fluent English,

as if by a miracle. He felt somewhat ludicrous in his worn uniform, with one of his hands swathed in a large white bandage. And he looked at Legionnaire Beratzky, who wore a fine suit of white cloth, without much affection.

"HAVE you understood what was said?" the captain interpreter-in-chief asked.

When Richard shook his head, he explained: "This man claims that he is not a deserter, because he was gone less than six days, and left from a zone outside that of military operations. Technically, he is correct, and the charge should be illegal absence. You are in a position, however, to charge him with impersonation, theft—"

Richard hesitated. "What would be the penalty?" he asked.

"Two or three years' penitentiary, I believe."

"Is it hard?"

"Very hard," the captain said, pursing his lips. "Most hard."

"And if I made no charges?"

"Sixty days' prison, probably doubled by the divisional commander." The captain cleared his throat: "Beratzky has been a fairly good soldier until now. Being a Legionnaire, the occasion to take a fine trip was too strong. He says that when he woke up at dawn in the morning, after exchanging clothing with you, and he found you missing and your friends fast asleep, unwilling to wake up,—he claims they had drunk heavily with him on their return following arrest,—he did not do as agreed, go to the barracks and clear you, because he was afraid of consequences. Your baggage was packed, and the bus was about to leave. He boarded it on impulse."

Richard looked at the Legionnaire. Beratzky was worried. It was awkward for Richard to find himself with several years of a man's life—a whole future, perhaps—waiting on his decision.

"No charges," he announced at last.

He could see that his generosity had made a good impression. Beratzky spoke to one of the officers, who nodded. Then he came forward: "Mr. Lacey, I wish to thank you, and to offer apologies for what I did. But if you knew how fed up a guy can get—"

"I know," Richard stated.

"I'll have this suit cleaned and sent back." Beratzky fumbled in the pockets, brought out some bills and a silver cigarette-case. "You can have this now."

"Sell the suit," Richard advised. "And keep that stuff. The case's a souvenir of the occasion."

Beratzky grew red, stammered: "Well, I don't know—thanks—" And he made a gesture with his hand.

Richard shook the hand, grinning. "Don't mention it!"

Beratzky was led out of the room.

"Now may I go to the hotel and change?" Richard asked. "I'll leave the uniform at the porter's, to be called for."

This was translated to the Lieutenant-colonel, who touched his grayish mustache with the tip of his fingers, and spoke at some length.

Richard saw smiles appear on the faces of the listeners.

"The Colonel says," the interpreter translated, "that the Legion returns the kindness shown to one of its members. That you may keep the uniform as a souvenir, although it will mean a number of false statements and forgeries on the accounting for the Government! He also states that you offer an embarrassing problem: As Legionnaire Casimir Beratzky, you were cited by your commanding officer, Adjutant Blaize, and therefore are entitled to the award of the Colonial Cross, with one silver star.

"However, as you are not really a member of the French army, the citation will have to be annulled—unless you contract an enlistment of five years in the Foreign Legion, in which case he will do his best to have the citation retroactive."

RICHARD laughed with the rest. "Please tell the Colonel that I would like to do so, but I am bound by a previous contract. In two years I shall be able perhaps to consider his proposition seriously."

This was thought amusing, and the Colonel spoke again.

"The Colonel has just said," the interpreter went on, "that he can almost guarantee to make you a corporal in three months—with special Moroccan high pay."

Richard shook his head. Then the Colonel folded an official form, inserted it in an envelope. To this he added a cross he took from his own tunic, after prying some ornaments from the ribbon. He beckoned to Richard to come nearer.

"Your citation. And a cross to go with it, monsieur." He grinned, and repeated Richard's words to Beratzky: "Souvenir of the occasion."

WHAT are you kicking about?" McGarron said angrily sometime later, as Richard was knotting his tie before the mirror. "You're not hurt, and you have something to remember. Tell him all the trouble we had—tell him—"

Travers gestured: "We thought you'd come back here, and taken the bus ahead of us because you were sore. We expected to catch up with you in Meknès somewhere. We got wise after a couple of days, when we heard some things about you. That you spoke French well—that you'd left bills for us to pay. Then your signature on the police-*fiche* looked queer—"

"He forged my name?"

"Sure. He even autographed for you." Travers laughed. "Oh, that egg's smart. Well, we went to the police—that was in Fez—and the guy laughed. He thought it was a publicity stunt and wouldn't send out an alarm. 'This isn't America,' he kept saying, 'and you are liable to a heavy fine, just for trying to misuse the police.' We practically had to pinch Ratzy ourselves, in the port police office at Mogador. It wasn't until I pointed at the passport picture, which nobody was looking at, that they got doubtful. It seemed too fantastic to believe. Want some advice?"

"Let's have it," Richard agreed. He felt so well, after a bath and a shave, with his own clothes on his back, that his resentment was vanishing.

"Get out of Morocco before the suits start. I have an idea that Ratzy didn't waste time on those three nights he was supposed to be you." He tapped an envelope. "Negatives. Bought them from one of the wounded brought in with you. Proof, Dick dear. They'll have to believe you."

"That's out," Richard announced. "I'm not using them for publicity."

"Turning noble, Handsome?" McGarron wondered.

"Maybe," Richard declared. "Come on. Let's go."

BUT in the lobby the three met the Colonel and the interpreter. And the commanding officer, holding something familiar between his tanned, wrinkled hands, seemed very bashful.

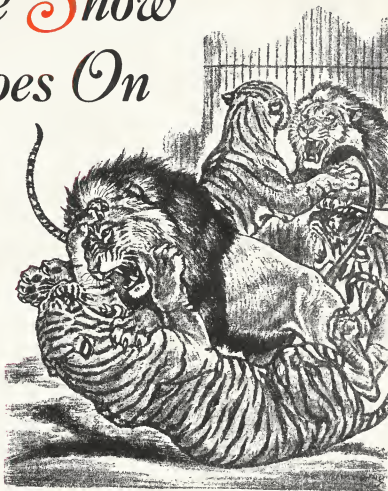
"The Colonel says," the other translated, "that he has three young daughters at home; that they are interested in moving-pictures. He is collecting autographs for them. So, if you would. . . . Many thanks; here's a fountain pen."

The Show Goes On

*A drama
of the
circus*

By

WILLIAM ARTHUR BREYFOGLE



IT was hot that morning, and Burke was irritable. He didn't look up when Henshawe came in, but waited for the ringmaster to speak. Henshawe waited too. The reek of sun on canvas filled the narrow space. Burke sat on a folding chair, in front of a table. "What is it?" the owner asked at last. And Henshawe said: "Anderson's back."

Even before he looked up, John Burke said: "We mustn't let Flora know he's here—before the act. Where is he?"

"I brought him here. He wanted to see you."

"And Flora?"

"Won't be on the lot before noon."

"She needs the rest. . . . How does Anderson look?"

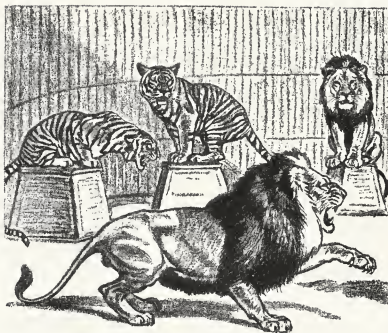
"Bad. Gone to pieces. Worse than last time."

"The old story. But send him in. Let's get it over."

Henshawe went out and Burke sat thinking. Without volition, his broad shoulders straightened. No good going on like this: Anderson always came back, always would. There was nothing left in the man. He was a wreck, and worse. A madman, you might say. Through with the big cage and the big cats—through with everything but sponging on John Burke, for old times' sake, and because he was still Flora's husband. Flora and Anderson were man and wife. John Burke had never heard anything to match that for—well, sacrilege, he'd call it! There was no one like Flora. . . . He looked up. "Come in."

In a voice like a croak, Anderson said: "You're surprised to see me."

Porthos was in a wicked temper; little by little she drove him to his perch.



"I don't know. It isn't the first time. What have you come for? Money again?"

But Anderson said, "No. What good's money to me? Look at me!"

You could still see, Burke told himself, that the man had been handsome once. Always thin, he was dwindled to little more than a skeleton now. His clothes were very ragged. He had clasped his hands, to keep them from trembling. His hair was thinner, its black shot with gray. But he had contrived a careful shave. His head was up, and his eyes even brighter than Burke's memory of them. The devil, come far down in the world! And John Burke asked: "What do you want, if it isn't money?"

"A job. Anything, as long as it's with the show. I was born with this smell around me. There was an old toothless lion I used to play with as a kid. I knew all about them once; they're all I ever cared for. Lions, and Flora."

"You'll keep away from the animals!"

"From Flora too—I'd keep out of her way for my own sake, and hers! You wouldn't think it, but I've still got pride. For God's sake, don't tell her I'm back!"

"A roustabout's job is all I can give you."

"It's enough."

"Tell Henshawe, then. And Anderson, for your own good, keep away from the cats! If that lion Porthos winds you,

he'll be beside himself, just as he was before you left. We had to take him out of the act. Flora was a month making him forget you. But the sight or smell of you would undo it all."

"I know. I don't want to see him. I've got something to forget, myself." He rose. "Thanks, if that's any good."

In spite of himself, Burke was sorry for the man. "Just a minute. Maybe it's too late; they don't often come back from where you've got to. But hard work may pull you together, and having next to no money to spend. If it does, by the time we get a new lot of animals—I'm promising nothing, but you were the best of the lot once. Think it over."

Anderson said evenly: "Thanks. But you can't fool lions. They'd see through me in a flash. There's no come-back, with them."

HENSHAWE was doubtful about it. They lunched together, at the table John Burke used as a desk. "There's men in the show I've never seen," the ringmaster admitted. "And maybe he'll try to keep out of sight, as he says. He's got reason. Still—"

"You can't tell a man to go drink himself to death." A man married to Flora, Burke was thinking.

Henshawe understood. "But was that all there was to his trouble?"

"No, it only took that form. Anderson was out of his mind. I can't explain it;



Illustrated
by Walter
Wilverding*

nobody can. His nerves went. Not his nerve, but his nerves. He'd spent his whole life in the big cage, and maybe his make-up wasn't any too stable, to begin with. That's the kind that makes the only great lion-tamers, but they never last. They burn out, the way Anderson did. He isn't the first."

"How's Flora, would you say, compared with him?"

"How would you or I be, compared with Flora? She puts them through their paces, by courage and patience and good timing. They won't start fighting for her, but she couldn't stop them if they did. She's as good as many, better than most. But Anderson was the best of them all! He had the cats crawling to his feet, and wanting to kill him all the time. All but that big one, Porthos. He only crawled when his belly was full and he felt like it. Other times, he and Anderson fought till one of them left the cage. It wasn't always Porthos. Anderson might have tamed him—I don't know. On the other hand, if it hadn't been for Porthos, Anderson might have been all right today. They had it in for each other. As it happened, the man broke first."

"He knows? He'll leave it at that?"

"He told me himself there was no come-back. Not with lions." Burke toyed with a spoon. "I don't pretend to understand him. He isn't our kind. But I wonder what he has left to live for, in a roustabout's job. Proud as the devil, too." Then he shrugged. "Well, part of the show! That's all you can say."

IN the dingy khaki Henshawe had found for him, Anderson made his way to the mess-tent. He didn't know why; he wasn't hungry. His cap was pulled far down. He found a seat at the end of the farthest table, and a negro put food in front of him. His neighbor whispered: "You had to come back, eh?"

Anderson turned with a start. "Hugo Wolfbach! You, driving stakes!"

"I lost my nerve."

"I cracked. But my God, Hugo! You, off the trapeze!"

"And you, out of the cage! Coffee?"

"Thanks." Anderson drank, holding the thick cup in both hands. "How long you been a roustabout?"

*Mr. Wilverding (who has spent a lifetime in the study of animals, both caged and in their native wilds) tells us that circus lions are mostly descendants of the Barbary lion, which is no longer encountered in the wild state, and which is distinguished by a mane much larger than that of the lions found elsewhere in Africa.

"Six months."

"What's it like?"

The German grunted. "One of them laughed at me the first day. I half-killed him. They leave me alone now."

"But don't you ever—"

"No, I'm through. There's nothing now but swinging a maul. I don't even watch the new man."

"Ever see Flora, Hugo?"

"She sends for me, when she can. The first time, I cried."

"Is her act—"

"Good! She's even got tigers in it. They remember you, I think. That's why she can do it. Porthos is better for her than for you. He doesn't hate her."

Anderson studied the bare boards of the table. "No come-back?"

"Not for us."

"When does Flora come on?"

"Last. The rest builds up to her. She's that good."

The bugle blew for work.

EVERYTHING went wrong that afternoon. The heat increased until three o'clock. Then, with summer suddenness, a storm blew up, and the rain came in solid sheets. The thunder set the animals pacing and roaring in their cages. The tent leaked, and the scanty audience was restless. Poles had to be braced against the weight of water, guy-ropes tightened. Yet it wasn't so much what had happened as what might happen. Burke could feel trouble in his bones.

The storm brought no coolness to the close air. When Flora came to his tent at the end of the afternoon performance, her white shirt was sticking to her back. She threw the heavy whip into the corner, unbuckled her pistol-belt and sat down wearily. "A cigarette, please."

Burke gave her one. "You're tired."

"A little. Porthos is having a bad day."

"The thunder?" Burke asked.

"It might be that. I don't know. He hasn't been this way since—not for a long time."

A small woman, not yet thirty. Sitting as she was, limp and with little sweat-drops gathering on her forehead and lip, she looked pitifully like an exhausted child. John Burke sat down. Married to a roustabout! Flora! To a madman, who had treated her no better than he had treated his lions! There was a moment when Burke knew what worked under Porthos' big skull at the sight of Anderson. He repented bitterly not hav-

ing sent that devil on his way today, to die in a cheap rooming-house somewhere. Liquor was too clean a death for him. But because he was Flora's husband, and because Flora was all that she was to him, Burke couldn't do that. Abruptly he blurted out: "Flora, do you ever think of him?"

Her eyes were almost closed. Without opening them, she murmured: "Sometimes."

"You don't love him any more?"

"No."

"Then marry me and be done with him. Marry me, and we'll quit this business, you and I. I'll sell the show."

"I can't marry you, John, dear. Not while I know he's alive."

"Divorce him."

"It's no use. I wouldn't feel clean. You can't shake off what's been, that easily. Not while he's alive."

"Is it easier to live with it, then?" he asked in bitterness.

"It isn't easy, but there's no help. My poor love, we can't choose." She opened her eyes slowly. "What's the matter?"

"I heard something—something just outside the tent."

They waited, but there was no sound. Flora asked: "The wind?"

"There isn't any. There it is again!"

"Like some one breathing?"

"That's it!" Burke went to the doorway, then stepped outside. Nothing. He walked around the tent, puzzled. But if anyone had been there, he was gone now. It might be imagination. He didn't like the idea of an eavesdropper. If it was Anderson, he'd knock his head off!



Flora went to lie down, after their early supper. John Burke moved a chair to the door of the tent and sat there smoking. It was the hour of day he liked best. The show relaxed, even in a one-night stand like this. There was time to take breath, before the darkness came and the lights went up and the crowd streamed in. Henshawe came to report, as he did every evening. "Everything all right?" Burke asked.

"That darky Jake got scratched. Backed up to the cage of Tim—you know, the big tiger. The devil's in that beast today. You'd think the cage-men would learn, but they never do."

"Badly hurt?"

"One shoulder clawed. Doc's fixed him up."

"Flora said Porthos was mean, too. And all the rest of the cats, I suppose?"

"Those two are the worst, Porthos and Tim. The other three tigers and the five lions are kittens, to them."

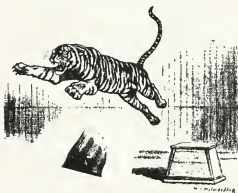
"They haven't had a fight since Anderson left."

"That's right. God, I hope they don't start that again! You remember? The whole ten of them clawing the hell out of each other, all over the cage!"

Burke remembered. "But the audiences liked it, especially the women. Part of the show, to them." He looked up. "There's something I wanted to ask you. Anderson came back today, and the cats are mean all of a sudden. Any connection?"

"I've kept my eye on him, and he hasn't been near them. I watched him all day, except just at supper-time. He'd be at mess then."

Burke remembered the noise outside his tent, but said nothing.



Porthos crawled along, belly to earth. In a second more he would spring again. And in that second Tim dropped like a fury on his back.

"I saw him talking to poor Hugo Wolfbach," the ringmaster added. "The other roustabouts let them alone, I noticed."

"When was that?"

"Just now. Paddy was picking out a squad for the ring tonight."

On the point of a startled question, John Burke caught himself in time. It didn't matter. Even under the floodlights, no one would know Anderson, supposing he were chosen for the squad. He would be nowhere near the big cage. Let it go. He knocked the ashes from his pipe and stood up. "We'd better be moving. Tell them to let Flora sleep as long as she can. I'm worried about the girl, Henshawe."

"There aren't many would take over her job." He glanced at Burke. "When she might have had it a lot easier, especially. They don't come any better stuff than Flora, Mr. John."

John Burke merely nodded. After a moment, he said: "Poor crowd tonight. We won't make expenses."

TO the contrary, there was better than a fair crowd. At leisure for the time, Anderson and Hugo Wolfbach stood in the shadow of the main tent and watched the throng. "Last year," Wolfbach said, "it was to see us they came. Or so we thought. But we are finished now, and still they come." He shrugged. "*Und alles rollt vorbei!*"

"Do you often watch them like this?"

"Often, now."

"The first time, for me. It makes me feel like two people. As if I had died yet were still alive, somehow."

"I know. You get over that."

"Did you want to get over it, at first?"

"No. I wanted to go back on my trapeze."

"Were you ever married?"

"No." The German looked at him. "But let us go. Anyway, they will want us soon."

It was lucky Wolfbach was there, some one to follow. At first Anderson was dazed. He couldn't get used to keeping out of sight when the band played, to keeping his head down and going about the tasks set him. He found the work unaccountably hard. It was bitter to admit weakness, to one whose body had been as tough and strong as the whips he used in the cage. He blinked at the lights that had never dazzled him before. The rounds of applause were intolerably loud. He had to blink angry tears from



his eyes. Why should it deafen him, when it wasn't for him, when they would never clap or cheer for him again? He saw that Wolfbach didn't once look up at the performers high above them in the air. And Anderson knew that his own agony had not yet reached its highest refinement—when they set up the big cage in the middle ring, when the cats came up the runway one by one, when he saw Flora slip through the little door and heard it bolted behind her.

A spasm of pain crossed his wasted face. Lions, and Flora! He'd had them both, and he'd lost them both. There was nothing more to lose. Oh, he'd heard Burke and Flora together in the owner's tent at supper-time! Burke was a better man than he'd ever been. But that, like talking to Hugo, like everything else that had happened all day, only went to point the one conclusion. . . . He looked about him, and no one was watching. A little later the German spoke to him, and got no answer. Anderson was gone.

IN ten minutes he was back, only a little out of breath, doing up the collar of his shabby tunic. "It's all right," he told Wolfbach. "I felt funny and went out for air. I'm fine now."

Wolfbach looked at his flushed cheeks and shining eyes, in alarm. "You were not drinking? You'll lose even this job!"

"No!" Anderson laughed. "I wasn't drinking. I think too much of the job for that."

The band stopped playing. The big cage was in place. They rolled up the

canvas shrouding it, to the top of the bars. Flora entered by the little door and shut it behind her. The first tiger padded up the runway, snarled at the woman and sprang to the top of its high square stool. One after another, the other tigers followed. Tim, a big, square-muzzled, slab-sided beast, slouched in last. He was restless; there was an angry tussle before he took his place. Then the lions came.

Five of them came quietly; then there was a delay. A buzz of excited curiosity ran through the audience. Porthos was in a wicked temper. He wouldn't leave his cage, and even in the runway he fought with the attendants. At a signal from Henshawe, the band struck up again, to drown out the high-pitched snarls. Then, still furious, he burst into the cage, the biggest lion of all. Flora had a chair in her left hand. Little by little she drove him to his perch. The act began.

But the cold sweat stood on John Burke's forehead. He didn't know when he had seen anything like it. The habit of dozens of performances, that should have quieted the animals, held only by the weakest of threads. They went through their tricks, but snarling, stopping to cuff at the chair, the whip, at each other, with paws that could strike like sledge-hammers. Only blind chance prevented an explosion; halfway through the act, when Flora stood for a moment under the arched bodies of two lions, standing on their stools and embracing each other about the shoulders, Burke had to shut his eyes. It seemed to him hours before the clapping began. . . .

The clapping stopped before it had well begun. What Burke dreaded for that night had happened. The cats were fighting, a lion and a tiger. He didn't know how it started; nobody knew. It was in the air. Good that Flora was out in the middle of the cage! From outside the bars, a cage-man fired a blank cartridge fairly into their muzzles, and the snarling beasts sprang apart. The lion was bleeding; he would have to be taken out.

When it was safe to take him out! A bad moment. Blame it on sheer mischance, on the thunder that afternoon, on Anderson's return—whatever caused it, the peril was there. John Burke, whose nerves were as sound as another's, could feel it. It was in the silence of the audience, in the shifting of the striped and tawny bodies on their stools,

in every one of Flora's quick and purposeful movements. It might go either way, Burke knew. But for this endless moment it hung undecided, and Porthos lifted and licked a mighty paw. It was then that Burke, following Porthos' suddenly fixed gaze, looked toward the door of the cage. He seized Henshawe, to hold him back. "No, don't! Don't stop him—there's no time. You'd only make it worse!"

NO time? Time stood still. . . . The roustabout flung off his khaki and stood in a scarlet coat, white breeches and black top-boots. Flora turned, saw him and put a hand up to her eyes. Still staring, she sank down in a faint. Anderson slipped in and slammed the door of the cage behind him. He had time to snatch up the extra chair that always stood ready. Then Porthos sprang with a roar.

Instantly the whole precarious balance within the big cage went to pieces. Again and again Porthos missed the man by inches. The other animals perched on their stands, feet bunched, tails switching, ready to spring.

"Flora!" Burke cried, without hearing the sound of his own voice.

But Flora lay motionless where she had dropped, and Anderson kept the big lion away from her. He was maneuvering, a foot at a time, toward the back of the cage; Porthos followed, with eyes for nothing else. He crawled along, belly to earth. In a second more he would spring again. And in that second Tim dropped like a fury on his back.

It was a signal. The rest of the ten leaped, like starters in a race, for each other's throats. Anderson snatched up his wife and ran with her to the door of the cage. Burke would have had him out, too, but he pulled his arm away. "A gun, that's all!"

"Give him a gun! For the love of God, a gun!" Some one thrust one at him, and Anderson slammed and bolted the cage-door. Now it was all right. He had a gun, and Flora's whip and a chair. He heard the audience take a long, shuddering breath. But this act wasn't over. For a moment he leaned with his back against the bars. Then he sprang forward to stop the fighting.

He broke up the lesser fights with the whip laid across their noses, the chair-legs in their ribs, his voice in their ears. He drove them apart, and one at a time, down the runway, with strength and



speed like theirs, and will and fury even greater. Cowed by each other's claws, prodded from outside by the keepers, the cats slunk back to their waiting cages. Six of them gone—seven, eight. But in the middle of the cage Porthos and Tim still rolled and raged, oblivious of all but mutual hatred.

Outside, Burke told Henshawe: "Go climb into a suit like his! Hurry!"

Henshawe blinked. "But why?"

"I may need you." He gave the ring-master a push. "Come back soon as you're ready. May need you any time now."

Porthos was getting the better of it when Anderson intervened. He got them separated, and there was no fight left in the tiger. It crept toward the runway, ears flattened back, watching the lion's every movement. In spite of the gun, Porthos sprang once more. At the very mouth of the runway the two beasts locked in one last scuffle, sharp and fierce. Then Tim tore himself free and bolted to his cage, and safety.

At Burke's elbow, Henshawe said: "Here I am, all ready."

"Stand here. Keep that cloak around you. I'll tell you what you've to do, if the time comes. How's Flora?"

"Wasn't scratched. It was just too much for her, seeing him like that. Doc's with her now."

Burke wasn't listening. No showman could take his eyes off the cage now. His whole heart went out to Anderson, the best of all the tamers. Nothing else mattered; he wanted Anderson to win.

The crowd up there was getting their money's worth, and no mistake! From their breathless attention, they knew it. The runway was clear. Time to send Porthos out of the cage now, after the others.

He crouched with his yellow eyes on the man, careless of what Tim's claws had done to him. He didn't move when this enemy threw the chair aside. Anderson dropped the revolver and the whip. In dead silence he walked slowly forward, and the big lion waited. One more step, and Anderson stopped. He reached out with his open hand and cuffed the huge jowl.

The movement the lion made was too swift to follow. From the seats, it might have been a tap, almost playful. Even then, Porthos didn't change his position. He crouched over his fallen foe, as if in solicitude. At a sign from Burke, the band struck up. The canvas rolled swiftly down the sides of the cage, and the cheers began. Burke pushed Henshawe. "Slip down there, quick, and take the bow. It's all over."

For Burke knew, before they came to tell him. It was all over. He knew, too, what the people would be saying as they streamed out of the stands. Sedentary people, fascinated by action and excitement, a little ashamed of a few minutes of strong emotion. "It was good, all right. They had me scared. Part of the show, but it looked real. But what's it matter how good they are? They'll soon be off the road; they can't buck the movies. It looked real, sure enough. Part of the show, of course."

He must notify the police, and the coroner. But he stopped, on his way, beside Porthos' cage.

"You here, Hugo? Porthos looks quiet enough now, doesn't he?"

The German said heavily: "He did Anderson a kindness, the man Anderson was lately."

About that, John Burke couldn't say. "Maybe he did. But certainly Anderson chose it. You saw him?"

"Yes, I saw him. He picked up his wife first, and then he made his lions obey him again. He couldn't have done it twice, but he did it once. And that was all he cared for in this world."

"Hugo, did he come back with this in mind?"

The German pretended not to hear. "And the crowd wild about him, too! Just like the old times! You can say what you like, he was lucky, that fellow."

One

Calling all readers! The famous author of "The Marked Man" makes his first appearance in these pages with a fine story of a Michigan road gang and the State police.

FOR the third time since noonday old Dan Conroy hollered, "Well, what the jumpin' devil!" and picked up a pry-pole and waded down the slippery detour to give a hand. It was an Indiana car now, hub-deep in mud, and the driver cussing a purple streak.

"Sorry, Mister," Dan said, and shoved the pole under the front axle, while a couple of men from the sodding crew laid planks for the wheels. The driver kept on cussing, but Dan didn't listen. He had troubles of his own today—big ones and little; and the biggest one his own boy Henry. Besides, he knew what this Indiana driver was saying. They all talked alike, blaming Dan and the State of Michigan instead of themselves.

The sign at the crossroad five miles back was plain enough if they'd just take time to read it. "Construction Ahead," it warned. "Avoid Delay by Crossing Here to U. S. 31."

They didn't read signs, though—to know what they meant, at least. Who did, anywhere? Just day before yesterday Dan had failed to read certain ones himself. . . .

The late summer storm had taken out the old iron truss span over Herring Creek on State Highway 22; and for weeks now, Dan had been building the new nineteen-foot concrete one. If it had been just the bridge, that would have been tough enough, what with traffic running at twice normal. He'd have handled it, though—one-two-three—abutments, back-fill, retaining walls, everything. But the roadbed had washed too, a good fifty yards of it at this south end. Then somebody down at State highway headquarters had taken a squint at the blueprints and said, "Let's straighten that bad S curve while we're at it." So Dan, being the maintenance-boss up here, had found himself with a couple of hundred yards of new ten-foot fill to grade, too, while traffic detoured around it over

Way Road

By KARL
DETZER

Illustrated by Grattan Condon

a farm road you shouldn't rightly drive pigs down. And of course it had rained.

"Thanks," the Indiana driver said. His wheels gripped, and he splashed ahead down the detour. Dan wiped his hands on the seat of his overalls. If the gravel crew could work a few minutes now without some other fool driver busting through where he didn't belong—why, a man only needed about thirty more hours to finish this whole job and get the road open and be on to something else! The bridge was practically done, and the approach too, on the north. Here on the south there remained a bit of graveling, a little work on a retaining wall, some shoulder to be finished. That was all. And a neat job it was, in spite of the headaches it had caused. But thinking of headaches—

Dan took a mouthful of tobacco. Golly, where *was* Henry today? If only Dan had kept him here at work on this road! Why, he'd never been in trouble before in his life. Everybody liked Henry! Twenty years old, and never even had got into little scrapes, the way a lot of boys did; and now to be in a mess like this, and Dan's own fault it was, even more than Henry's!

"Hey, Dan!" somebody yelled.

DAN gave up thinking, and waded back across the fill. A scraper was rumbling toward him, its driver pointing. "Look how that new dragline runner's dumpin' the sand, boss! Humpin' it all in one place!"

Dan nodded and walked on. He'd noticed it already, had talked to the runner about it twice this afternoon. The fellow running the new dragline digger was moving a sand-hill from the south bank of the creek to make this last shoulder fill—and moving it badly. Not the slick way Henry would have done it. Dan reached the machine. A good city block it was from the barricade, almost at the foot of the bridge itself.



"It aint a mountain you're building here, Mister," he shouted patiently, sticking his head into the housing where the operator stood. "Spread it out."

The fellow tried. You could say that much for him. But the next bucketful landed again right where it should not. Dan watched. This wasn't a big enough job for a dragline, in the first place. There'd been an accident, though, Monday, the very first day Henry wasn't here. The runner Dan had hired in his place caught hold of a hemlock root with the division clamshell and snapped its boom. Wasn't another clamshell hand, of course. But a dragline outfit had just finished a job in the next county, so the brass hats sent it in yesterday to clean up. If they'd only sent somebody along



Tony shouted: "Get an earful of this, boss! Them crooks just shot it out with a State cop over by Wellston!"

with it who could operate this big baby, and root dirt, it would be all right; but this college fellow trying now must have learned how out of a book.

"Get out and move them mats up three foot," Dan told him, pointing to the planks on which the dragline stood. "Give your bucket shorter reach." He was going to wait and show him how exactly, but here came the straw-boss of the mud crew.

He was yelling, "That last slab of footing we put in has begun to settle, Dan!"

"Well, tear it out," Dan hollered back, but he climbed down. He'd have to go see. You couldn't take a chance with the base of that last retaining wall, or the next spring freshets would upend it.

IT was Dan's mature judgment, based on sixty-three years of observation, that once things start to go haywire with a man or a job, they go completely. You never know what news will come up, but it's sure to be bad. And no matter how bad it is, or how it hurts, you take off your coat and lick it here and now. . . .

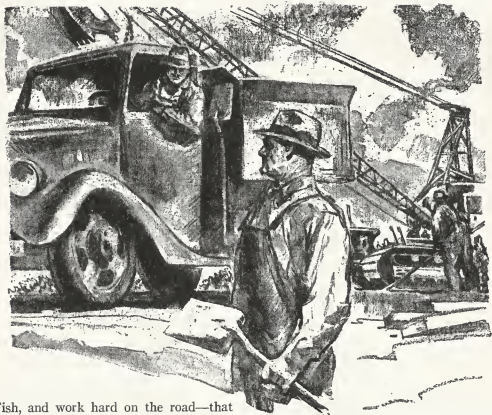
If only Henry hadn't had the chance to make more money somewhere else, by glory, he could have handled this new dragline. Henry could run one of these big diggers better than you could read about in a dozen books. Never waste a motion. Henry was best all-round road man in the whole district maintenance force. Do anything, Henry could, from push a rotary plow in winter to handle a dragline digger in the mud. Throw more

snow or more dirt than three other fellows. He'd be a foreman this time next year, if this other thing hadn't come along.

Dan spat; why, golly, he couldn't even spit straight today! It was no use blaming Henry for what had happened. He'd almost had to quit this job. Couldn't afford not to. Having big money offered him the way it was, and him wanting to get married and all! A man had to work where he could make the most money, didn't he? Why, Dan himself had urged him to take it. . . .

Dan dodged a truck. Tony Alaska was driving it. You could tell Tony's truck always by the couple of iron knee-fenders still sticking up in front of it, where the double blades of a V-plow had been attached last December. It still had a radio in the cab, too. Radios on these highway trucks were a new idea last winter, tuned to State police frequency so the big boss could keep in touch with his snow-plows. Even now, in summer, Tony liked to keep his turned on, just the way Henry and all the rest of the younger fellows did these days when they had the chance. Radio crazy, all of them. As Tony rumbled past, the loud-speaker was hollering, of course; Dan could tell from Tony's face. Dan waved him on. He knew well enough what it was talking about!

Why, confound it, he'd ought to have guessed Henry's new job was phony. Henry couldn't be expected to, himself. What had *he* ever seen of the world?



Fish, and work hard on the road—that was all Henry ever had had a chance to do. And court Stella, ever since he was a kid. Even Stella had wanted him to take the job; and wasn't she having a time now, worrying about whatever had happened to him, not calling her up since Sunday night? It wasn't her fault, though, any more than Henry's. He, Dan, should have known. When you come to think it out, could you imagine that real resorters would want a hired man so bad, just somebody to drive 'em around and show 'em the good fishing-places, that they'd pay him fifty dollars a week?

Naturally, all Henry could think of was that fifty dollars would set Stella and him up to housekeeping a lot faster than the State's twenty-eight dollars and eighty cents would. Met these two strangers on the road Sunday night after he'd taken Stella home, and fixed a tire for 'em—for nothing, too, of course, that being the kind of cheerful, good-natured cuss he was. Always doing things for people. The men had offered him the job on the spot. Smith and Brown, their names were. Sure, even their names sounded phony to Dan now, but they didn't then. There *were* people named that, weren't there?

Why wouldn't Henry come home tickled? He wanted to get somewhere

in the world. And glory, he should, with that grin, and him as good as he was! Sunday night he'd rushed in the door a-yelling, and called Stella right back on the phone and told her: "Say, we're in the money now, kid!"

THE project clerk ran up with a bunch of papers; Dan signed them without reading, and tramped on. Things here seemed to be going right enough for the moment; steady line of loaded gravel-trucks coming up the road from Billy White's big borrow-pit; dragline digging, even if the bucket did hit the right spot only half the time; bulldozer smoothing the shoulders clean and flat as a kitchen table, with its motor playing a tune like a snare-drum. . . . You couldn't always tell by the look and sound of things, though.

Dan reached the retaining wall.

"It's like this," the foreman said. "Other end there—look, Dan, see how it's making for to settle?"

Dan climbed over the back-bracing of the last empty form and stared down at the foundation slabs. "Yeh," he agreed. He'd made a mistake about this, too, then, thinking they'd dug all the muck out of this spot before they started pouring concrete. Well, they'd have to stop

and fix it now. Take a few extra days, but it was off here at the side. It wouldn't delay the opening of the bridge, at least.

"Trouble is—" the straw-boss said, and went on with a lot more, till Dan interrupted:

"What's that?" For after the word "*trouble*," he'd heard nothing else. Mention of it had torn his thoughts right back to Henry. Monday night, after the first day on his new job, Henry drove back home just at supper-time, in a little coupé—not a big car, either, as you'd think a pair of rich fellows would drive, if you'd had sense enough to think then.

The men were with him, all three crowded in the seat. They didn't get out of the car, though, only sat there smoking while Henry walked up the path in his new tan shoes, carrying a whole lot of fancy new fishing-tackle, too. Say, was he excited! Swellest job in ten States, he said, and what did Dan think? They'd paid him two weeks in advance. A hundred dollars down, just because he'd shown 'em the black bass bed first thing that afternoon. They'd caught their limit. . . . He was going to call Stella now, and tell her, too, these men would have work for him all fall, and maybe all winter, they said.

HE didn't call Stella, though. He hadn't had time yet, when Mr. Smith and Mr. Brown began hollering at him to hurry. . . .

Dan's mind snapped back. The straw-boss was saying, "So what'll I do?"

"Tear down the forms for this last section," Dan directed calmly. "Rip out this whole footing. Have somebody take a twelve-pound sledge. That concrete's still green enough to bust up. Sure, it's too bad. Spoon out the muck we didn't get the first time. When that's done, call me."

He re-climbed the bank, and hurried back to the dragline and eased himself up to its doghouse.

"Give me the levers a minute," he said to the college fellow.

The runner stepped back, looking at the blisters on his hands, and complaining something about it being a hard outfit to handle, and Dan started right in to show him he was wrong. He only needed to know how, was all, and the poor dumb-bell didn't even realize what a swell doghouse it was, sheeted in with steel plates welded together, so the vibration wasn't bad on your teeth. Henry wouldn't be

complaining. Dan shot the bucket out to the end of the boom as if it were his own fingers, and came down clawing dirt and scraped it up and dropped the load, all with a single sweep.

"Like this," he explained above the noisy motor. "Watch close. Like this. And if you want the next load over here—like this."

He undermined a hemlock root the size of a kitchen stove; and as it started to slide down the bank, he shouted: "You got to aim this digger like a gun, see?" The projecting steel teeth in the jaw of the bucket dug under the stump and picked it up and hurled it aside as if it were a pebble. "Like that," Dan said. "My boy Henry can run one of these things better than me, even if it was me that taught him."

AND then he wondered: Did he imagine this college fellow put up his eyebrows at mention of Henry? He got down fast, saying nothing more. No matter what anybody might think today, Henry was still a good boy. He wouldn't hurt anybody. Why, Henry was so soft underneath, that half the time he didn't even clean the fish he caught! Dan struck off down the road to help with a gravel truck that had bogged its rear end in a mudhole.

It had to be Tony Vlaska's, of course, since that was the one with the radio Dan didn't want to hear; and sure enough, the voice in the cab was shouting:

"Attention, all cars in Benzie County! Continue your search. We have positive information that these men still are hiding in your vicinity. This is WRDS, Michigan State Police."

Tony looked at Dan and said: "I sure hope they grab them guys! Killin' old Tom Manning! I hope they burn their pants!"

"Yeh." Dan said, and chewed. Tony was right. Anybody that did such things had it coming to get caught, no matter who he was. It wasn't Henry, though. A killer. . . . Dan bent down quickly, so nobody could see his face, and peered under the truck.

"Bring them blocks!" he shouted. "Ease 'em in here, Tony. That's it." He stayed on hands and knees, remembering again how Henry had gone back to the car Monday night, taking Dan with him. How Henry had said: "Meet my dad, Mr. Smith, Mr. Brown. Swellest guy on earth."

Henry was like that always. Had a proud streak. Liked to show off his own folks. Dan rubbed his hands on the sides of his pants, they felt so sticky. Henry and the two had driven off, and it wasn't till last night that Dan had any more word of them. Not good word, either.

Dan had gone to bed early; but tired as he was, he hadn't been able to sleep, what with wondering when he was going to get this fill done, and how the drainage was going to work out, come next spring. Thinking about Henry, too, but not worrying over him then, just feeling proud. It wasn't many boys could work for city fellows at fifty dollars a week, even if it did mean a Conroy quitting the road. . . .

Dan spat. He heard Tony Vlaska holler, "everybody push," so he looked around quickly and saw how they had the planks all laid and him hardly giving a hand, and the pry-poles were let down, and Tony was gunning his motor. So Dan went around fast to the rear end and put his shoulder against the tailboard, the way a good boss should, and began to shove.

A couple of other drivers walked forward to help, their own trucks being tied up behind Tony's, and one of them said: "Terrible about the night marshal gettin' kilt, wasn't it?"

"Yeh," Dan said, and pretended he was too short of breath to talk any more; but the driver grunted, pushing against the truck, and went right on:

"Hear the shots last night?"

Dan said: "Oh, sure. Live just second door from the bank."

"How many was there in the gang?" the driver asked next, the way everybody else did.

"Two," Dan answered quickly. "Tom Manning said there was just the two strangers in the bank when he stuck his flashlight in the door."

THE truck was rolling now, with Tony giving her the gun, and gravel spraying up from the wheels; Dan eased his shoulder from the tailboard and started to go somewhere else in a hurry. Why the jumping devil did everybody want him to talk about last night? It wasn't as if they knew what he did about Henry and his new job. They didn't by rights know anything. Just asked questions.

This lunkhead of a driver was saying: "I don't believe there was only two of them, and both strangers, at that. May-



"She said to let 't go—
said she couldn't wait."

be there was somebody old Tom didn't notice. Somebody sittin' in the car. Somebody local round here."

Dan forced himself to halt.

"Oh, I don't see that follows," he argued. "Lots of these burglars don't have any local help."

"Yeh, some don't. Only how'd they happen to go in the alley through Mrs. Berry's woodshed, and down that passage? Say, you got to know your way round to find that back door after dark. Your boy Henry and me used to play round there when we was kids. I remember—"

Dan said, "Move your truck up ready when Tony gets his dumped," and turned his back on the man, feeling hollow in his legs.

Henry wouldn't do such a thing. He'd die first. No matter what anybody said. Maybe those fellows just happened to find their way in back of the bank—it would be plenty easy to do. You must do lots harder things than that if you were a crook. Maybe— Dan stopped,

cold with a new idea: why, maybe they'd killed Henry first. Maybe he was dead now. Maybe that's where he was this minute. He wouldn't go with them, and they'd killed him! For these were the two men that had hired Henry. It was their fifty dollars a week Henry was going to put away to get married on. Wasn't any doubt about it. Old Dan had a memory for faces, and the State police brought a lot of bank-robber pictures for Tom Manning to look at early this morning before he died. Tom didn't accommodate them, because he couldn't hold out that long, but Dan had looked at them. So had everybody else in town, including Stella. But she hadn't seen Henry's new bosses, so that was all right so far. She'd have something real to worry about if she only knew—not just wondering why Henry'd been gone three days and not phoned her.

Jake Burgo and Sonny Maik were the true names of Mr. Brown and Mr. Smith. Dan hadn't said anything when he saw the pictures; just coughed and thought of Henry. Why, the State cops said these two had killed plenty of people, broke jail and robbed a half-dozen banks this year.

ANOTHER loaded truck was grunting up from the south, and Dan stopped it and looked at the gravel.

"What's the matter with you guys?" he yelled at the driver. "That the best grade o' material you can find down there?"

It wasn't really bad run-of-pit gravel, but a fellow has to have something to holler about if he feels as if he's going to burst open. The driver was surprised. Dan didn't find fault usually, but he kept it up now. "Think the State wants to pay for stuff like that?" he demanded.

It was Bert Reynolds driving, and he apologized fairly enough, saying maybe his load did have a little clay in it that he hadn't noticed.

"Better notice next time," Dan yelled, and waved him on.

Tony had dumped his load on the approach to the bridge. He was bouncing back with empty box, his radio still going full tilt. Dan picked up a shovel lying near by and began to paw around on the loose spread gravel. He might listen in to the news himself this time, if nobody were noticing—or let them notice. Certainly plenty of others had been listening in today, since this man-hunt started.

Tony didn't merely slow. He stopped right beside Dan and shouted: "Get an earful of this, boss! Them crooks just shot it out with a State cop over by Wellston!"

"**S**HOT it out?" Dan repeated, and he tossed the shovel back where it belonged. "Oh, no, they wouldn't—" Tony gave him a funny look, so he said, maybe a shade too anxious: "Did the cops catch 'em?"

"No," Tony answered. "Got away again."

Dan took out his bandana and wiped the dirt from his face. Funny how a man could sweat on a cool day like this.

The radio was shouting: "Car 55, get to intersection of Highways 115 and 31 and stay there. These hoodlums are headed north. Don't let 'em past. Car 89, get to crossroad two miles west of Harrietta. Party there may have information."

Tony let his voice roach up with excitement, hollering: "Why, they aint fifty miles from us, Dan! Don't see how strangers find their way in that country over there."

Dan said: "Maybe they got a road-map."

Tony let his truck into gear. "No road-map shows them old back-country trails." He started to ease forward. "If they come this way—gosh, I wisht I'd brought my shotgun!"

Dan spat, and reached for his tobacco pocket.

"Move along," he changed the subject. "Don't hold things up."

"If I'd just brought my gun—" Tony repeated. He couldn't get a thing loose from his head, once it lodged there, so he began again: "If I had my gun—"

"But you aint!" Dan heard himself scolding. "And if you had, it wouldn't speed up this job. You just haul gravel."

But he had another chance to listen himself before Tony pulled away. "Attention, all cars!" the radio was crying. "It is believed that the bandit coupé is headed for a hide-out near Upper Herring Lake. All units in that vicinity—"

In that vicinity! Dan jammed his hands into his pockets. Why, so far as that went, this whole doggone' work-crew was in that vicinity! Upper Herring lay only five, six miles north of this very spot. . . . The two men paying Henry fifty dollars a week had rented a house somewhere on that lake. The radio was continuing:

"Stand by a moment; special dispatch to Car 7. Trooper Clefsky, who was shot by the bandits near Wellston, died before he reached Manistee hospital."

Dan stuck out his jaw, as he always did when he saw how he ought to be thinking, but found it hard to think that way. His head felt giddy-like. He backed against a gasoline drum to steady himself. First Tom Manning and now a trooper. Murder, and murder again.

"Wisht you had brought that gun, Tony," Dan said, and thought: "If Henry was with those men—well, he'd have to stand the gaff. No two ways about it. He'd been taught. He knew there were no U-turns on a one-way road. Start traveling down it, with anybody, and you got to keep going, no matter where it ends." . . . A horn sounded near by and a man laughed, as Dan jumped. Gosh, what was the matter with him anyhow, gawking right in the path of a loaded truck? Henry wasn't with those men now. Not unless they'd hog-tied him. Sure, he'd been taught. Dan had taught him, and he was a good pupil.

The crew hand-finishing the bridge-rail needed advice. He gave it, skipping nothing. He waited, after that. There was no reason he shouldn't idle a minute, was there? It never took Tony long to load. Next to Henry, he was best man in the outfit. Here he came, at length.

Dan began to walk to meet him. He could see from the way Tony's face was bent over the radio that some fresh news was on the air; and before Dan knew it, he had started to run. Tony stopped, obligingly; he didn't even ask why Dan was running. Even so, Dan nearly spoke out, asking if it were news about Henry, but he caught his tongue. You never needed to ask anything of Tony. He'd tell you without, give him a chance.

Tony yelled: "Listen, boss, them fellows is getting closer! Stuck up a gas-station at Mesick and headed west!"

DAN put his hands back into his pockets so Tony couldn't see them shake. Once when Henry was a kid, he'd worked after school in a gas-station over in town. Got fifteen cents a day and bought Stella a Christmas present with it. "Heading west, eh?" he said to Tony. "Must be zigzagging. Back up a piece here and dump your load."

"Hey, look!" Tony cried. "Cops!"

Dan looked. A State police car had rolled up Highway 22 from the south; and one-armed Carrigan, the watchman,

was waving his red flag. A trooper with a shotgun climbed out and Dan could see that Carrigan was for putting up some argument, so he hurried to settle it.

"Can't get across here?" the trooper was asking.

"Sorry," Dan answered. "Can't let you nor anybody else."

"That's good," the trooper said. "One less bridge to guard. Where's the detour lead?"

"Up to Jordan's bridge," Dan told him, pointing to the right. "Then back to 22. Four miles. Bad road all the way."

THE trooper ran for his car, and it headed east into the muddy detour. When it had gone, Carrigan stuck the red flag under the stump of his arm and allowed: "Nobody's a-goin' to cross here with me on guard, cops or nobody else."

"That's right," Dan agreed.

"Hope the cops get 'em," the watchman persisted. "Hope they get them killers."

"That's right too," Dan said; and it was, of course: if a man got tied up somehow with killers, no matter who the man was, no matter if he couldn't help it himself—

"Hey, boss!"

Dan looked around, searching for the voice. A workman on the bank waved his hat and yelled: "Running out of sod, Dan."

"Another load due in any minute," Dan answered, and hearing his name again, swung around the other way. Who the jumping devil was it now, yelling at him? Couldn't a man have a minute to think to himself around here?

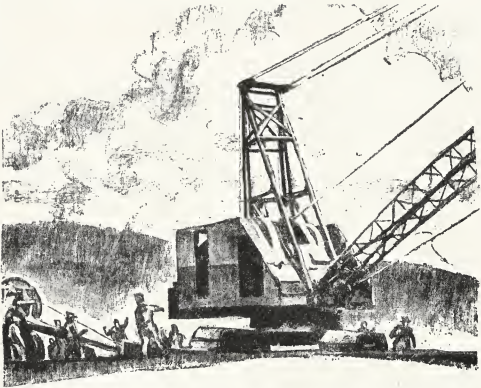
Bert Reynolds was back with a fresh load of gravel. "Say, Dan," he called, "somebody's askin' for you on the phone up to Billy White's house. A woman run out and told me."

"Calling me?" Dan repeated, astonished.

Bert had rolled up closer. "It's Stella," he said in a low voice, and grinned, thinking this was a good joke, that Henry's girl would bother his old man at his work, but not letting the rest of the crew hear him, Dan noticed; not staying sore at him for bawling him out a few minutes ago, either.

"Stella?" Dan repeated. "Thanks."

Must he go? She was just upset. Bert was rolling on. Dan stared after him, at the license-plate hanging with one screw loose on the back of his truck. The ex-



planation came quickly to him then: Maybe Stella had news. He nodded to Carrigan and walked away down the road. Why, sure, that was it. Relief made him sweat. Henry had got word somehow to Stella, and now she was getting it on to him. Or maybe—

He began a dog-trot. On the other hand, that might not be it, at all. This might be more bad news. Maybe somebody else knew now about Mr. Brown and Mr. Smith, had recognized Henry with them and told Stella. . . . Maybe somebody had found Henry dead.

Dan felt as if he were going to be sick.

"Hey, Tony," he yelled, "give me a lift to the borrow-pit."

A MILE south, directly across the road from Billy White's house, the steam-shovel was loading gravel into trucks. It would take only a couple of minutes to get there. But before Tony had gone ten yards, his radio was shouting: "That bandit coupé just went west through Bear Creek. Deputy and posse at Onekema head 'em off!"

Tony said: "Gettin' closer."

"Yeh," Dan agreed, without looking at him. Too close. If that posse missed them and they *were* headed for Upper Herring Lake, they'd bring up right close here, and no telling how soon, either. "Maybe if you'd shut off that radio onct,

you'd haul more gravel," he snapped unreasonably at Tony. "Hurry up. I want to get back to the men." But the receiver let out another yell.

"That coupé turned north on 31 one mile east of Onekema. On your toes, everybody! Watch out, units on 22—they may swing over to you!"

"Golly," Tony muttered, "if I just had my gun—"

"Leave me out," Dan interrupted hastily. "I'll meet you going back." He straddled the ditch and ran to Billy White's kitchen door. He'd have to keep Stella's mind easy, no matter what she wanted or what she knew. If this weren't important, though, he had made a mistake in coming. There wasn't much time.

Onekema was less than twenty miles away. Highways 31 and 22 were nearly parallel along here, and not a dozen miles apart. There were plenty of crossroads between. He ran breathlessly into the Whites' kitchen. The woman who had called Bert Reynolds was not in sight. He ground the crank of the telephone, and when the operator answered, asked for Stella.

"She said let it go, Mr. Conroy," the operator told him. "Said she couldn't wait—she'd see you tonight."

"Well, gol' damn!" Dan exploded. "Aint that like a woman?" He slammed



There was a crash of ripping metal . . . the bucket pulled free and spat out broken glass.

the receiver into its hook and ran back out of doors and across the road to the pit.

"Hey, Dan!" the pit-boss stopped him. "Here's a driver with a busted rear ex!"

"Well, I *will* be damned!" Dan said.

He hesitated. If those two devils should come up this far on 22, certainly it was no time to be bothering with truck axles in a gravel-pit. If they had made Henry come with them. . . . He put that thought away. It made no difference whether Henry was with them or not. Thing to do was to stop the car. Get back into the main highway and somehow—up by the barricade would be best—stop 'em. But glory, didn't he have a job to boss? Tony's truck already was loaded.

"Go 'long—move out," Dan told him.

HE made sure quickly that the axle really was broken, and ordered an empty to tow the other out of the way. That took eight minutes. He ran again then. He couldn't wait for a ride.

If Henry was driving that car— He denied it again, talking to himself, panting. He'd just settled that. Henry wasn't driving it. He wouldn't. Unless they made him. Unless they held a gun on him. Unless he had some scheme of his own and up this road he thought there'd be help.

Dan had that feeling again in the pit of his stomach. Henry knew as well as he that the shortest way north to Upper Herring Lake lay straight across this bridge. He knew just how far along the bridge was, too—that you could go over it if you had to. In that case— Dan set his jaw. By glory, he'd stop that car some way if it came helling up this road. He couldn't let it matter who might be in it. Fiercely he thought: "Killed a cop, did they? Killed old Tom Manning!"

A straw-boss yelled, "What's the trouble, Dan?" and started to run after him.

"Nothin'!" Dan yelled back, and left him behind. It suddenly had come to

him, just what to do—why the jumping devil hadn't he thought of it before?

He knew how to stop that car. It wouldn't halt for any barricade, wouldn't turn down any muddy detour, that was sure, no matter who was driving.

He overhauled a northbound truck and swung to the running-board, howling: "Well, can't you make better time than this?"

The driver looked surprised and speeded up. But Dan didn't get into the cab. He stayed on the running-board; and a moment later, passing Tony's empty, he leaned out and yelled: "What news?"

"Still headed this way," Tony shouted back. He said something else. Dan didn't hear what, didn't try to hear. He didn't need Tony to remind him that if these killers were headed this way a few minutes ago, with the cops behind them, they still were. There was no turn-off this side of that five-mile crossroad. The driver slowed to let a southbound empty pull back around the barricade, and Dan jumped out—he could make better time on foot from here. And the watchman Carrigan hollered: "What's the hurry?"

Over his shoulder Dan yelled: "If they come through, I'll handle 'em!"

Carrigan howled back: "If who come through?"

Dan ran on, around the end of the barricade. It wasn't far now to the dragline.

If Henry *should* be in the car, too—well, God help him if he was. It could not change what a man needed to do. Running, Dan shook the sweat from his face. His breath was getting short. He could reach the digger, though.

BUT after twenty more paces he heard a motor coming behind him. And coming fast. He took a quick look over his shoulder. A coupé, all right. And was it moving!

If he could get into that dragline ahead of it—but he couldn't. He'd failed. No time left for anything, except to get out of the way. He heard a shout and swung around to see Carrigan loping out in front of the barricade, waving his torn flag, trying to force the oncoming car into the side road where the State cops had gone.

"Get back!" Dan screamed at him. But Carrigan wasn't the sort to shy off from trouble—he just planted himself in the middle of the road and waved faster.

The coupé hit him first, then hit the barricade. Carrigan turned over like a fence post rammed by a snowplow, like a fence post lay still. The air was full of little yellow splinters from the barricade, and the car was coming on.

Dan ducked as it skidded past him in the fresh gravel, with somebody shooting at something out of the window. It headed straight for the bridge.

Dan couldn't see how many men were in it—two or three; but he prayed, regardless: "Dear God, don't let him be in it, and he's worked so hard, been such a good boy—" He broke off, staring. What the jumping devil was happening to the dragline?

SOMEBODY in the last few minutes had swung the long boom around from across the ditch. It stuck out over the road now, with its immense steel bucket drawn up tight to its far end.

Dan gasped. Did that college fellow have the same idea he'd had himself? Did that awkward cub think *he* could stop these demons with the dragline? Why, it would take smart aiming to put that bucket—

"Oh, glory!" Dan yelled. The boom swung lower, suddenly. The bucket descended two feet. It hung there for a careful instant. Dan's heart stopped. The fleeing coupé was almost under the boom. Then the bucket dropped.

Fast and sure, it came down. Some one was shooting again. Dan could hear the slugs pinging against the steel side of the doghouse. The bucket swung nearer. . . . Now the car was trying to dodge it.

Then the long iron jaw of the bucket caught it squarely through its left side. Dan couldn't have done a neater job himself.

Taut cables were snatching the bucket back toward the digger, dragging the car along with it as if it were a hemlock root. There was a crash of ripping metal and the car was turning over. It rolled on its top, and the bucket pulled free and spat out broken glass.

And Dan was hollering. Praying again, in a hollering voice. With a cold feeling in his heart, he was asking help for Henry.

The wrecked coupé lay on its back with its wheels spinning, as if they still were trying to get away; and Dan was running again, and going down on his knees, and reaching in through the window.

That was Mr. Smith, crumpled up so motionless behind the wheel with his neck bent under him, and Mr. Brown beside him, stretching out his hand toward his gun. Dan got it first and looked again. Mr. Smith and Mr. Brown and no one else. No Henry.

No Henry in the car. So they hadn't made him drive. They'd killed him, too, as well as old Tom Manning, and a State cop, and Carrigan.

Dan arose slowly. A straw-boss was already laying one-armed Carrigan out on the new sod and putting his hat gently over his face. Dan dragged Mr. Brown out of the upset coupé, then Mr. Smith. Mr. Brown's eyes were open, and he was looking up at Dan, scared and yet mean.

"Where's Henry?" Dan heard himself shouting. "Where's my boy Henry?"

"Who?" Mr. Brown asked, trying to get to his elbow.

"Henry!" Dan cried and had to shove him back with one foot.

The college kid was yelling somewhere. Dan looked around. Then he kept on looking. Were his eyes going bad, as well as his legs? For the college boy wasn't in the digger. He was standing right here behind Dan, squalling at him, saying somebody had thrown him out of the doghouse onto his face.

"There he is, too," the kid yelled. "Look, climbing out of the digger now!"

IT couldn't be Henry! Henry was—why, praise God, if that was Henry, and it sure was, why, Henry wasn't dead. It was Henry who had spilled this car! And what right had a grown man sixty-three years old to start blubbering, anyhow, and what was Henry hollering at Mr. Brown?

He was hollering: "So you will tie me up, you buzzards!" He tried to grab Mr. Brown by the neck, and old Dan had to shove him back, too. There'd been enough murder. Besides, here came another car, helling down the road.

It stopped at the smashed barricade, and that was a State trooper getting out and running this way. He seemed as glad to see Mr. Brown as Henry was.

"Hi," Henry said, then. "Hi, Dad!" And he grinned.

He had a black eye and a long cut on his chin. . . . So he'd put up a fight, had he?

"Hi, boy," Dan answered; and he took Henry's arm and sort of leaned on him, just a mite, to rest his legs, while Henry explained to the trooper, how he'd begun

to think yesterday morning there was something phony about Mr. Brown and Mr. Smith. They began to ask him too many funny questions, and they didn't intend to fish any more, it seemed. They just made him drive around, for no reason you could see, over all the back roads. Then last night they came right out and told him they were going to tap the bank. Said they'd cut him in on it. When he refused, Mr. Smith was for shooting him right then, but Mr. Brown said no, he was just a dumb cluck. So they tied him up instead, and shoved him into a cubbyhole off the kitchen.

He couldn't get loose. Wiggled and hollered for help all night and all day, till an hour ago young Petey Richards, the milkman, heard him. Petey busted a window and cut the ropes, and of course he knew the last word about the robbery, chase, everything. Who didn't? Radio in his car was going full tilt just like everybody else's. It didn't take Henry long to get the news clear in his head, or decide what to do, either. He knew where that bandit car was heading back to, and how it would need to come. So he'd torn down here from the north with Petey, while Dan was off running after Stella. He'd run across the new bridge, still not knowing just what he could do till he laid eyes on the digger.

"It come to you, then! You figured that out too!" Dan cried, feeling warm inside.

Well, you could expect it, he thought. Henry was bright. And it was a joke on the crooks too, if you could call anything about this affair a joke, that they'd picked the honestest boy in the county for their fifty dollars a week. "You handle the digger very nice, Henry," he said. He stepped out of the way of the troopers, carrying the dead Mr. Smith. "Twenty-eight eighty a week isn't such bad pay, son."

"It's enough," Henry said.

DAN took a good breath. "That's fine, then," he said. "You're hired. We can clean up this mess and start right back to work."

"You go get a shovel, brother," he told the college fellow. "Plenty for you to do around here, that you can do. You hop right into that digger, Henry. First, though—" He looked up the road. "Catch a ride up to Billy White's first, Henry, and see if you can reach Stella now on the phone."

TRUMPETS



Here befell sharp work and fierce . . . as the axe

from **O**BLIVION

This seventh impressive story in a series designed to make ancient legends real and understandable takes you back to the Viking Age.

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

A STORY of grim deeds, of heroic simplicity, of strange wisdom—a shadow against the moon. It began in the quiet study of Norman Fletcher, the white-haired old Yankee scientist, whose fame as a wizard of electricity made him sought by the many famous men who came to our city.

Sir John Broughm was such a man. When I interviewed him and he found I knew Fletcher, he insisted I take him out to the great estate that was one vast laboratory for the Pan-American Electric Corporation. Not that Broughm needed taking. He would have been welcomed without any introduction other than his name, being the most noted astronomer and mathematician in Europe—an old, frail man, looking as though any strong wind would blow him away. . . . Gentle, wise, but very steady and serene.

So they sat talking, and I listened. Broughm was a strange contrast to the forceful and energetic Norman Fletcher, whose age seemed to increase his powers. We were speaking of Fletcher's pet belief that any myth or legend could be traced

back to an actual cause, and Sir John Broughm nodded his head.

"Superstition, Fletcher, is only another name for faith, belief in something! Yet none of man's wonders or marvels is half so marvelous as the wonders of astronomy."

Fletcher looked up sharply, gave me a glance, frowned uneasily.

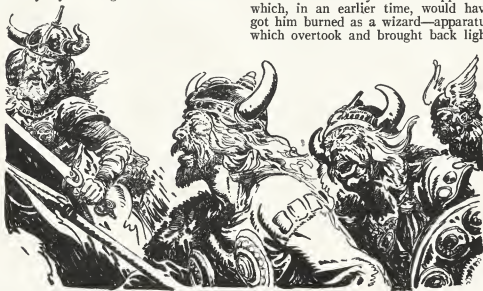
"Wrong, Sir John. I could point you an example, if you have time."

"I always have time to be proven wrong," said Broughm with his gentle smile, "but the effort is not invariably successful."

"Mine is apt to be. Excuse me; I'll be back very shortly." Norman Fletcher rose, and gave me a word: "Tell Sir John about my demonstrations before your Inventors' Club, like a good chap."

He left the room.

I TOLD Broughm about our weekly meetings with Norman Fletcher, who had undertaken to trace for us the origin of various legends and superstitions. He did this by means of apparatus which, in an earlier time, would have got him burned as a wizard—apparatus which overtook and brought back light



hewed at Hall, twice he cut at Erik and missed.

and sound, scenes and happenings of past ages.

"At least, he says it does," I went on rather lamely. "None of us quite believe in it. He refuses to explain his inventions or apparatus. I'm not sure that it's not some sort of illusion or television. He claims it's a by-product of ultrasonic wave experiments."

"Startling and extraordinary, if true!" said Broughm. "Yet he's famed for his work with short waves, for his discoveries in this almost untouched field. Science has only attained the edge of such discoveries. You say the voices are recreated?"

"They can be," I rejoined. "He has to dub in voices somehow, to make it intelligible to us."

NORMAN FLETCHER returned, smiling, and set forth his excellent cigars.

"Talking about my demonstrations, eh? Well, I had a queer thing happen. I was fishing in the ether, the other day, and caught something. I'm still tuned in to it. It's the example I mentioned, Sir John. You're acquainted with the name of Yggdrasill?"

Old Broughm lit his cigar with care, and nodded.

"Yes. The mystical ash tree of Norse mythology—its roots in hell and eternity, its great stem supporting the world, its branches reaching into the heavens. A singular conception. The ash, of course, has always been linked with magic and necromance and wizardry."

"But," asked Fletcher, "how would you explain such a legend or myth?"

Broughm waved his cigar. "Oh, very simply! The tree of life, of knowledge, of time and space; a tree has always symbolized these vague abstract things to primitive races."

"Indeed? You think a rough, rude, bloody race like the early Norsemen could even conceive so fantastically beautiful a thing? Trees meant little to them, remember."

Broughm looked startled. "I hadn't thought of that. Perhaps—er—have you reached some other conclusion?"

"I have. I know exactly how the Yggdrasill legend originated," said Norman Fletcher. "Through my apparatus? Yes, of course. I couldn't make a public demonstration with this story; it—well, it wouldn't do, that's all. A story of grim deeds, of heroic simplicity, of strange wisdom . . . a shadow against the moon. People might not understand—"

He finished vaguely, a disturbed look in his face as his voice trailed off. But the old astronomer laughed and came out of his chair, eagerly.

"But I will. The moon, at least, is in my province! Where do we go for the tale?"

"We go," said Fletcher, "into Norway of about the Fourth Century A.D. Come along to the laboratory, both of you."

His manner was strange, his usual affability had departed. He wore the air of a man who has decided against his better judgment, but goes on to the end.

We entered his private laboratory. The walls, solid granite like the rest of the house, rose twenty feet to the roof. Three walls were occupied with apparatus. The fourth was blank and empty. Before it were ranged the easy chairs usually occupied by Norman Fletcher's guests, grouped about his own chair and control stand, which resembled the front of an organ. This showed no connections or wiring of any kind, yet from it he controlled his remarkable demonstrations.

He seated himself, touched a switch, and the room lights dimmed.

"The tubes require a little time to warm," he said apologetically. "And I should tell you, Sir John, that the voices you will hear come in translation; you will appreciate the necessity. The actual language of past ages and peoples would be gibberish to us. Of course, if I were to pick up, for example, the intimate conversations of Lord Nelson and Lady Hamilton, their speech would be intelligible to us—"

"God forbid!" exclaimed Sir John with a shocked expression. "If you can really do such things, what secret of history, of life, of human contact, is safe from your prying?"

Norman Fletcher gave him a queer, straight look, a one-word answer:

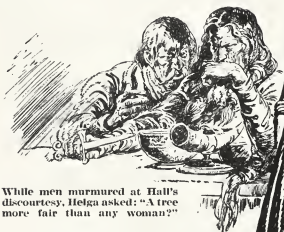
"None."

Sir John Broughm produced a handkerchief and wiped his brow nervously.

BUT now the light began to grow, and talk ceased. A pale yellow light appeared on the blank stone wall in front of us. It deepened, strengthened, became whiter. Fletcher touched a switch, and a section of the wall disappeared. Rather, the stones seemed to dissolve; the light pierced them, banished them.

Then we were looking through the wall, as through a window, at an upland countryside, at an old-fashioned farm spring-house where women were at work.

Byres for cattle and grain and a lofty, rudely massive building showed aside. The women here were churning milk. One of them, obviously in charge, was tall, nobly made. A gold ring clasped



While men murmured at Hall's discourtesy, Helga asked: "A tree more fair than any woman?"

her arm, where the sleeve of her woolen tunic ended. She had yellow hair in huge braids that fell over her shoulders to her ankles, and she was older than the rest. Thirty-odd or so.

Helga, the others called her. Despite their laughing chatter, they paid her respect, but not in fear. Her features showed grave tenderness; her deep eyes were warm.

"Oh, news, news!" Another girl came running and panting, to join the work. "Biorn Bareleg just went by on his way home! What do you think, Helga? Who do you think has come home again? Do you remember Hall Grimson, who was carried off by rovers years ago? All of fifteen years ago. I've heard my father tell of it."

Helga's face lost its ruddy color for a moment. "Hall Grimson!" she echoed. "Yes, yes. I knew him. He was given up for dead long ago. You say he's back?"

"Yes. I heard Biorn telling the thralls about it at the horse-trough."

Helga stepped outside and approached the horse-trough, where two thralls were caring for the horses. The air was keen and fine with the autumn frosts, the trees on the hills were riotous with color. And, against the coming long winter, the thralls and farmers were bringing in wood from the hills, huge piles of it.

"What's this story that Biorn Bareleg was telling you?" Helga demanded. "Is Hall Grimson really home again?"

"Yes, lady." The thralls nodded, and one went on speaking. "Though it will



Pen drawings
by John
Richard
Flanagan

do Grim no good, for he died two years back, and his woman last year, after selling the stead."

"What of Hall?" Helga asked sharply. "Where is he?"

"Down there." The thrall pointed toward the distant fiord. "Landed from a trading-ship. A great man now, a wizard, wealthy—oh, strange stories, says Biorn! But if Hall seeks to sit in his own house, he'll wait long. Erik the Priest bought it, and Erik keeps what he has."

Helga turned away and went to the house. One thrall winked at the other.

"And Erik will get what he has not, one of these days, eh? She'd bear him



Hall Grimson

strong sons; she's not too old. He wants her, and these lands of hers, now her man's dead."

"May Odin avert the day!" said the other thrall. "Remember, you fool, how Erik flayed that thrall of his alive, last winter? Hope not to fall into such hands!"

Slaves, indeed, had a hard life and a hard death, in those days.

HELGA went into the long house and hall, and opened a chest in her own room, at the head of the common hall. Ere long, Hall Grimson would come here. His father's property, now part of the wide lands of Erik, the priest of Odin, adjoined this farm; Helga had known Hall in other years, had known him well. That was before he disappeared, carried off by raiding vikings; before she had married Gorm the Red. The years had flown; Gorm was dead, she was mistress of these lands, and widely courted. . . .

When Hall Grimson came, that evening, she was wearing her new gown of white wool, the gold ring on her arm, and

about her throat a necklace of little seashells such as children make. She sat at the head of the board; her farmers and women, her thralls, two visiting chapmen with goods to trade, and Olaf, brother of Erik the Priest, made up the company. Hall Grimson strode in at the doorway and halted.

"The gods be good to all here!" he called in greeting. "Is there welcome and guesting for a homeless man?"

"A seat beside me is waiting for you, Hall Grimson," said Helga, and stood up to meet him, a glow in her face, her eyes shining. "You have been long coming."

"A late comer takes what's left, as the saying goes," he said, and strode up the hall, and put out his hand to hers. A flush rose in her cheeks, and he took the bench at her side, while all present stared at him.

"Where have you been since I saw you last?" she asked, smiling. He looked at her, looked at the necklace of seashells, and laughed.

"To the end of the world. To Mickle-garth, the city of the Romans, and beyond. . . . I'll talk, though, on an empty stomach, Helga of Gormsdale."

Food was brought in, steaming meat and fish, and beer in plenty. There was scant talk for a while; all eyes were still upon Hall Grimson.

He was stark and tall, heavy in the shoulders, smooth of face and rugged as rough stone; he wore a shirt of glittering links, and a sword that glittered also. Until now, iron was little known in Norway, being a rare thing. But Olaf, brother of Erik, spoke up with his crafty and slithering tongue.

"You have traveled far, Hall Grimson. But in all your travels have you seen a more wondrous thing than the sun shining on Norway hills, and the beauty of Lady Helga there?"

"Aye," said Hall, and emptied the beer-horn while men murmured at his discourtesy. "Aye. A tree."

"A tree?" repeated Helga. "More fair than a woman, any woman?"

"More fair than all the world, more wondrous than all the world!" exclaimed Hall with a certain fierce ecstasy. "It is Yggdrasill, the mystic ash."

Some laughed, some frowned, but he eyed them with arrogant high gaze and went on:

"The tree grows at the world's end, and it supports the whole world. Its roots go down into hell and emptiness, its branches extend up into the heavens.

There is no tree so great as Yggdrasil. I came home to tell you of it."

They regarded him uncertainly, for he spoke in grave earnest. But Helga, from the side, saw something white within the mass of his dark hair; it was a white scar that ran half across his head.

"Is that the only reason you came home, Hall?" she asked.

"I do not know—I do not know," he said almost vaguely. "There was a fight; my head was split; I have forgotten many things, Helga." He threw out his hands with a helpless gesture. "I had so much to say, and now it is gone! I came to tell of the tree, and brought a sword for those who refuse to hear of it."

OLAF, who sat across the board, laughed softly, sneeringly.

"We have swords also; why another, Hall? None are much good, for the edges turn and the blades bend. Even this sword of mine," and he hauled it forth, "would bend on a skull like yours—if you think to make trouble for any here."

So he sat, half threatening, bronze blade extended across the board. Hall Grimson laughed, and moved suddenly. His sword came out; one swift, clanging stroke, and it smote the bronze blade clean asunder.

"Answer enough!" said he. "You never saw a sword like this, Olaf Flatnose!"

True; the gleaming, glittering blade went the rounds and was examined by all men with envious admiration. This was before the day when peace-bands were worn upon weapons, and men said Hall had done well not to slay Olaf where he sat, for the threat.

"I learned to make such swords, in Micklegarth," he said. "I intended to do great things here in Norway; but most of them went fluttering when my head was hurt."

"The curse of Thor, most like," suggested Olaf.

"Thor?" Hall roared out a laugh. "Thor and Odin and all the old gods are dead! The shadow of Yggdrasil fell upon them, and they died."

At this blasphemy, Olaf and the two chapmen and others departed in anger, refusing to hear such words. But Helga rose, and taking Hall's hand led him outside into the starlight, and sat with him on the bench outside the door, still holding his hand.

"Dear Hall," she said softly, "that was a great wound on your head, and it has

done you great hurt. Greater hurt lay in your departure. I waited, until I had to marry Gorm; now he is dead. Have you come back to me, Hall?"

"I have not, I have not," he rejoined, and groaned. "I thought you were lost to me forever, and I gave you up. I wandered here by chance, Helga. What was my purpose in coming? I cannot say. It had something to do with the tree; I know I meant to tell all men about the wondrous tree. But nearly everything that happened while I was gone, is forgotten."

"And you did not come back to me?"

"I took oaths; what they were, I cannot remember, except that I gave up all women," he said brokenly. "Nor would you want me, Helga. I live from day to day, everything a blur to my mind. I have riches—for what? Whence came they? I do not know. Ah, the necklace of shells that I made for you on the shore! You have kept them."

"And your image, Hall," she said, very gently. "Yes, I'd want you, if you came to me. I've always wanted you, always will. An oath forgotten cannot hold—"

"Don't tempt me!" He stood up abruptly, and groaned again. "Oaths, solemn oaths! I dare not break them! Yet I know only that I came to tell Norway of the tree. Why? That I cannot say, Helga. The gods are dead; only the tree matters . . . the tree—"

He plunged at his waiting horse, disregarded her frantic words, and rode off like a madman, into the night. . . .

Helga of Gormsdale resumed her quiet, serene sway over the stead and its farms. She put away the necklace of shells, she put away her white woolen gown, and worked hard getting the beer brewed, the meat and fish smoked, the wood in and other tasks against the long winter.

She perceived the truth, sadly. Hall Grimson held all the world's wonders in his head, and could have no good of them; that white scar told how the blow had sealed them away, spoiling his memory. Men said the gods had punished him thus.

TALK of him drifted in, as the autumn waned and the first snows boded the winter. The whole land talked of him, indeed. He drifted hither and yon, guesting with one man, then another, driven on by fears and quarrels as he spoke against the gods. His tales of the Yggdrasil tree waxed more wonderful and were repeated afar, and were half



believed, for he was most furiously earnest about it.

Its roots went down into the realms of death, and were nourished by the fountains of all wisdom; whoever found this tree and had a piece of its mystic wood, could not die. Its trunk embraced the whole earth and upheld it firmly against all assaults of the giants and of the dragon Nidhug, the creatures of evil. From its branches, reaching into the topmost heaven, fell eternally a divine dew of honey that brought peace and happiness to men, and security against evil and strife.

Security to Hall Grimson it brought none. Tales of killings drifted in, until Helga sat wide-eyed and fearful whenever news came. A chief in Throndheim was slain; another over the fells in Markland; fifteen angered men waylaid Hall under Thorsness and attacked him, but five fell there and the others fled. Matters went worse. He was outlawed at

the autumn Thing, and fled into the uplands, to the high crags of Eaglefells, and there built himself a lair.

From Gormsdale, Helga could look up to those rocky heights, could fancy that she saw him there, now and again. Once he came down, when Erik the Priest was sacrificing a horse to Odin, and he braved Erik at the gathering and spoke again of the tree that obsessed him. Words led to blows, and he killed four men there and wounded Erik, and went away.

He came by Gormsdale that same night, strode into the hall, and asked for food. It was given him; none knew as yet of the doings at Erik's stead. Now he had a shield of bronze plates, and on the outside he had bound two ash twigs, one across the other. Helga asked him what this meant, but he did not know.

"It is a sign," he said; he had become gaunt and terrible, but when his eyes touched on Helga, they became warm and pitifully entreating. "A sign. I have forgotten the rest. A sign of the tree, Yggdrasill."

"Stay with us," she said. "You are welcome here, Hall. Stay, and tell us more of your wondrous tree—"

"I cannot," he broke in. "There was a fight at Erik's place tonight; snow is

coming down and I must be away so it will cover my tracks. Battle, battle! Why must it always be so, when I seek only peace and a chance to tell of the tree that conquers all evil? But I cannot remember. However, Helga, I remember one thing. When we were children, and I made you that necklace of shells, I said some day I would bring you a glorious golden necklace from afar, one fit for a queen! Here it is."

He put something in her hand, went out to his horse, mounted, and rode off.

spinning, with two women and her thralls, when Erik strode in. And, from outside, came the murmur of voices tokening many men there.

"Greetings, Helga of Gormsdale!" said he, and came forward—a tall, powerful man with yellow hair falling over his shoulders, and his huge war-axe dangling from his wrist. He ignored her startled greeting, and halted before her, eyes flaming.

"I am not given to halfway measures, Helga," said he. "It is told me that this



"The tree endures, though I perish," said Hall. "It is greater than any man."

When Erik's men came in pursuit, snow had covered over his trail. But Erik, what with his wound and the insult to the gods, and the killings, swore bitter vengeance, and fell to gathering his men.

HELGA wore the necklace Hall had given her, and from this came trouble. There could be no hiding its source; it was said to be the greatest jewel in all Norway. A necklace of massy golden links; and hanging from it was a golden cross, upon which was worked the figure of a man with outstretched arms. A curious thing, and what it meant was unknown to any.

She was wearing it the night Erik came so suddenly. There had been heavy snows, and now they had crusted well so men could travel on skis. Most of Helga's people had scattered to their own steads; this night, she sat in the hall

accursed Hall Grimson has given you gifts—aye, I can see his gift on your throat now. You know well that I have sought you in marriage."

"Me or the lands of Gormsdale?" asked Helga, looking at him unafraid.

"Both," he said bluntly. "I have many sons, but none born in wedlock. I want you to be mistress of all these lands, and of my hall. I have come to take you and send you to my stead, while I go to destroy this Hall Grimson."

A thrall, a brave man, caught up a knife from the board and sprang to defend his mistress. Erik snarled and struck out quickly with the axe; the thrall dropped, with his head crushed, and the women screamed.

Erik the Priest laughed at them.

"No halfway measures!" said he. "I've courted you with fair words long enough, Helga; now I'm taking you in my own way—"

She came to her feet in a flame of anger and struck him across the face; then Erik tapped her skull with the axe-haft, and she collapsed, senseless. He bound her hands with a strip torn from her own kirtle, and called in his men—two score of them, with his brother Olaf, heavy laden and armed. They could not reach Hall's lair until the second night; the climb was hard, and they could travel only at night, for Erik hoped to surprise him. Now he signaled out Olaf and another man.

"Wrap her well and tie her on one of the sleds," said he, "and take her home. Guard her well until I come."

"What about this place?" said Olaf Flatnose, looking at the comfortable stead, and the women. "It is a fine place."

"It shall be yours," said Erik, "provided you keep her safe for me."

So Olaf Flatnose was well pleased, Gormsdale being a wealthy valley.

He and the other man bundled Helga and tied her on a small sled, and set forth along the trail, deeply broken through the snow by the company. Reach Erik's stead they did not, however, for where the trail curved in Eriksvale, the sled suddenly went off sideways, flinging itself and them into the deepest snow. Floundering, they loosed the lashings and drew Helga out, and in the moonlight Olaf saw that her hands were free.

"You threw off the sled!" he cried. "That was ill done—"

"This is better done," said she, and snatched his spear, and drove it through him.

The second man fled from her; in her wrath and despair, she was like a Valkyr maiden dealing death. Before he could get his feet planted in the ski-straps, the spear smote him, and this was his bane. Then, taking the skis and weapons of those two, and their packs of food, she set forth.

NEXT afternoon, Hall saw her coming, though he knew her not. He sat at the mouth of his cave high on Eagle-fells, at the sharp summit of the pass called Axefirth, being like an axe-blade against the sky. From here he could see all the lower country, even down to the fiords and the sea beyond. He saw her figure coming straight along the snow-

slopes, but could not see Erik and his men, since these kept from sight.

Late in the afternoon she came up the last climb, following the path Hall himself had broken. When she came close and he saw her face, he knew her and leaped up in amazement. With her burden, and the extra pair of skis over her back, she needed all her powerful build to make the climb.

"Helga! I thought it some peasant from the other side of the hills. You?"

"Not I alone," she said, flinging off her burden and standing erect. "But life and death, and perhaps the end of many a man to boot. Look!"

She pointed. Far below, appeared many tiny dots: Erik and his men, beholding her figure climbing ahead, knew that Hall was warned and had thrown off secrecy.

"Erik the Priest and his men," she said.

Hall smiled grimly.

"They'll not be here before moon-rise; time waits. Come into the cave and start a fire. You're blue with cold."

BY the blaze they shared the food she had brought, while she told him all that had happened down below. He listened, lips tight and eyes angry.

"For that, Erik shall die!"

"Not so," she returned calmly. "You seek peace, you say; well, prove your words! I brought skis and food. Go now, down the eastern slopes into the inland country. Fear not for me. I can hold up my own end. With Olaf dead, Erik will think twice ere he lays hold of me again; besides, I have many friends."

He looked at her and his jaw set hard; then he shook his head.

"Go I will not. I am not minded to run from a few men, least of all Erik."

"Then I stay with you, Hall; I have waited long to share things with you."

"Stay if you must," he said stubbornly, "and learn the worst."

"Agreed, then. The moon is at full, and rises early. But suppose I were to go with you over the hills?"

"You could not," said he. "I have sworn oaths against all women."

"Many oaths make much ruth." And she laughed mirthlessly as she spoke.

They sat through the sunset into the darkness, while Hall talked of the wondrous tree as she had never heard him, with magic in his voice and earnest air, making up words and phrases as a skald makes poetry, until all his talk fairly

sang and shimmered. She knew then why word had gone afar about him, for it was a marvel to hear him speak in this fashion. What the tree meant, however, he could not say.

Just before darkness came, he went outside and looked; Erik and his men were coming steadily, though still a long way off. He came back and heaped wood on the fire.

"Best burn it all now," he said. "Tomorrow it won't warm us."

Later, he put on his shirt of links, and a fur above it, and wiped sword and shield. Helga took the sword and spear of Olaf Flatnose. The moon was just rising, but the rocky approach to the lair was in darkness, being on the west-ern side.

"I hear feet crunching," said Hall. "They have put off their skis. Here, stand on the ledge before the cave; that way, only one at a time can come at us."

Feet crunching the snow and scrambling among the rocks came closer.

Presently Hall lifted his voice.

"Ho, Erik! What seek you here?"

"I seek nothing, but the gods seek vengeance," came the voice of Erik. "Who is that standing behind you?"

"You shall find out, when you come closer," answered Helga.

They knew her voice, and were astonished. In the obscurity below, the massed figures became visible, and the moonlight reached them by degrees. Erik the Priest stood forth, his long axe in hand. Before the ledge where stood the two were strewn boulders, so it was difficult for more than one man at a time to get at the place.

"Now, Hall," said Erik, "there is an end to your footless talk about your tree."

"The tree endures, though I perish," said Hall Grimson. "It is greater than any man; all the wide empire of Rome has bowed to it."

Erik laughed harshly. "I will answer your silly lies, Hall. You say that the branches of this wondrous tree reach up into heaven?"

"And higher," said Hall. Erik laughed again and swung up his axe, pointing to the full disc of the moon.

"Then how does it happen, Hall Grimson, that these branches you prate about cast no shadow on the stars or the moon? There's answer enough for you. At him! At him—and Odin further the work!"

The men yelled acclaim. Bowstrings twanged; the shafts flew, but Hall ward- ed his head with his shield, and the ar-



rows that struck his body glanced from the chain shirt.

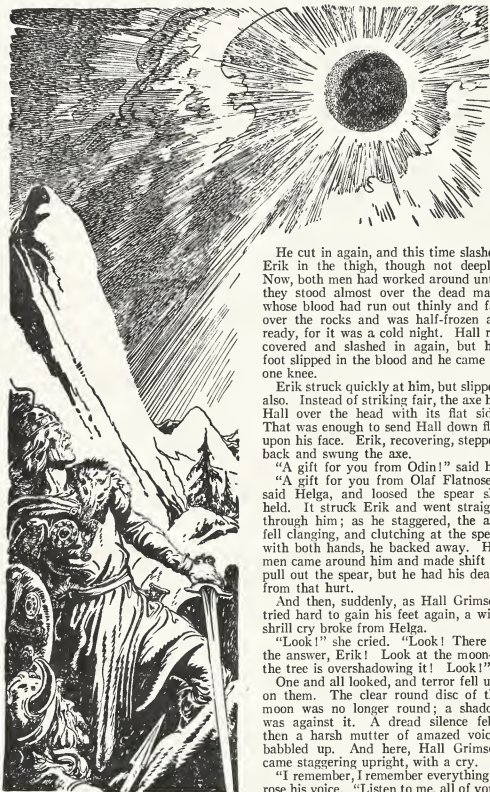
"With wizards, spear and sword have more luck than arrows," snarled Erik. "Take him!"

Two men came scrambling up the approach, eagerly. They came running at Hall with weapons glittering. The foremost stood hewing with a sword, the second shoved in a spear. Hall thrust forward his shield, his white sword swung and fell, and sheared off the hand and arm of the first man, who turned and ran, shrieking. Then Hall caught the spear and drew it to him, and the second man with it, and smote him to death.

"Your gods choose poor workmen, Erik," said he, with his harsh laugh.

Erik foamed at his men, but they bade him earn his own keep, and with his broad axe swinging, he came striding on. The moon was lighting all clearly now.

HERE befell sharp work and fierce. Erik the Priest was heavy on his feet, but very long in the arm; it was hard to get within sword-reach of him. Hall leaped about as the axe hewed at him; twice he cut at Erik, and missed. The shield was shattered and smashed from the blows, and he threw it clear, blood running down his arm.



The disc of the moon was no longer round.
"Kill the wizard!" went up a roar.

He cut in again, and this time slashed Erik in the thigh, though not deeply. Now, both men had worked around until they stood almost over the dead man, whose blood had run out thinly and far over the rocks and was half-frozen already, for it was a cold night. Hall recovered and slashed in again, but his foot slipped in the blood and he came to one knee.

Erik struck quickly at him, but slipped also. Instead of striking fair, the axe hit Hall over the head with its flat side. That was enough to send Hall down flat upon his face. Erik, recovering, stepped back and swung the axe.

"A gift for you from Odin!" said he. "A gift for you from Olaf Flatnose," said Helga, and loosed the spear she held. It struck Erik and went straight through him; as he staggered, the axe fell clanging, and clutching at the spear with both hands, he backed away. His men came around him and made shift to pull out the spear, but he had his death from that hurt.

And then, suddenly, as Hall Grimson tried hard to gain his feet again, a wild shrill cry broke from Helga.

"Look!" she cried. "Look! There is the answer, Erik! Look at the moon—the tree is overshadowing it! Look!"

One and all looked, and terror fell upon them. The clear round disc of the moon was no longer round; a shadow was against it. A dread silence fell; then a harsh mutter of amazed voices babbled up. And here, Hall Grimson came staggering upright, with a cry.

"I remember, I remember everything!" rose his voice. "Listen to me, all of you! The tree Yggdrasill is the tree of life, the tree of the cross! I was sent into these lands to tell—"

"Kill the wizard!" went up a roar. Bowstrings twanged. A spear slanted athwart the moonlight. One and all turned suddenly, rushing forward in panic fury. "Kill the wizard! Slay them both!"

A shaft searched out Helga where she stood, and another; she sobbed a little and leaned back against the rock, drooping. A spear struck Hall and glanced from his chain shirt; an arrow thudded through his neck above the protection. They surrounded him like wolves around a stag, striking and tearing.

His sword glittered. Men died there around him as the steel hacked and stabbed. There was less light now; half the moon's face was hidden.

"Helga, Helga!" The voice of Hall Grimson lifted again, for the last time. She made answer, but faintly, and with the effort, collapsed. A cry of grief and pain burst from him; as they pulled him down, he fell forward on the spear that thrust him through.

His voice was stilled, his tale untold, a tale for which this northern world was as yet unprepared. But as word of this night's work went abroad, men remembered other shadows against the moon, and against the sun; and so they discovered that the story of the wondrous tree Yggdrasill was not fancy, but sober fact—there was the proof of it in the heavens! What else could shadow sun or moon?

THE clash of weapons faded, the darkened moonlight died away. To a touch of Norman Fletcher's finger, the room lights brightened; before us was only bare stone wall again.

"Most remarkable! Most remarkable, Fletcher!" Sir John Broughm leaned back and gazed wide-eyed at our host. Fletcher, puffing his cigar alight, nodded.

"I think so myself," he said judiciously. "Reduced to essentials, we have the story of a man carried away into slavery as a youth; winding up in Byzantium, after the Eastern Empire had adopted Christianity; and no doubt becoming a monk and setting forth to convert his native land. Fighting on the way, a hurt head, a loss of memory in large part—nothing remained with him except the symbolic story of the Christian emblem—the tree, as it was so often called. Imagination did the rest."

"Pardon me, gentlemen." I cleared my throat uneasily. "But, Mr. Fletcher, I

was looking up subjects to talk over with you for future demonstrations, the other day, and I came upon this Norse myth of Yggdrasill. The queer thing is that scholars say it actually had its origin in some half-understood story about the Cross!"

"Nothing queer about that," said Norman Fletcher, smiling. "You've just seen how the myth did originate. Incidentally, Sir John, I think it makes my point. Just what was your remark on the subject of astronomy?"

SIR JOHN BROUGHM's white brows drew down.

"Ah! I remember. None of man's wonders or marvels is half so marvelous as the wonders of astronomy—hm!"

"Proven by the tree of Yggdrasill," said Fletcher, "to be wrong. Is there anything in astronomy half so marvelous as the dimensions of the Christian tree? In its embrace of the world, its extent up into heaven and—"

"Tut, tut! I concede no such thing, sir!" exclaimed Broughm. "I did not come here to argue religion. I refuse to argue it! On the contrary, if it were not for astronomy the demonstration you have just shown us might be called illusion, trickery, anything!"

"What has astronomy to do with it?" demanded Norman Fletcher.

"Just this, sir. Presumably, the date of your story of Hall Grimson was about the end of the Fourth Century, A.D. Am I correct?"

"Roughly, yes," agreed Fletcher. "As nearly as I can assign it."

"And about that time, sir, there was a total eclipse of the moon visible in Norway; the exact date I cannot recall at the moment."

Fletcher stared at him. "Why—upon my word, Sir John! Why, that would prove—"

"It would prove nothing, sir,"—and Broughm rose to his feet,—"except matters which I do not care to discuss, or even to think about. I still maintain, sir, that no figment of man's imagination can equal the wonders of astronomy!"

Fletcher regarded him fixedly for a moment, then smiled.

"I get your meaning. After all, was the tree of Yggdrasill a figment of man's imagination? Or was it a divine—"

"I refuse to discuss the matter," Sir John said hurriedly. "Good night, sir!" And on this, we parted.

Another story in this unique series will appear in the forthcoming June issue.

All They Could

The lure of a rumored cache of gold in the desert leads to a dangerous expedition and a desperate adventure.

AN old Indian plodded wearily along a desert road. He wore shoes not mates, both full of holes, through which sand drifted in and out like water. At each step as he raised his foot, a cascade of sand sprayed downward. The old Indian fell down in the road, lay a few moments, then struggled to a sitting position and looked toward a cabin in the direction he had been walking. It was not far away, but too far for him. He lay back in the sand, brought an arm up over his face to ward off the intolerable sun, and prepared to die.

At the cabin, not over a quarter of a mile away, two white men—one with field-glasses—were watching the Indian.

"Cowboy," said the man with the glasses, "he's disappeared. I think he keeled over, because I saw him stagger a couple of times. He looks like a Mex."

Cowboy took the glasses from his companion. "Probably a Injun," said the Cowboy, searching the brush with the glasses. "Maybe he laid down to rest up a bit." He put the glasses down on a bench beside the cabin door. "I got to be gettin' along an' locate them wanderin' cows. I think they're beddin' over in them yuccas back of the windmill. I'll stop an' see what that Injun is doin'."

"I think I'll walk down and see myself," said the Cowboy's companion. "He looked like he was in trouble."

They passed down the sandy driveway which the Tenderfoot had carefully outlined with gleaming white rocks, and to the roadway that wound through brush higher than a man's head.

"I'm getting to like this Mojave Desert," remarked the Tenderfoot. "When I had to come up here on doctor's orders, I thought I couldn't stand it, specially the snakes and the spiders. But now," he shaded his eyes with his hand, peered down the road,—"well, you know, the charm of the desert and all that."

"Yeah, all that. I know." The Cowboy grinned. "We cuss it out, an' end up

by likin' it. —There's that Injun; he looks sick."

They came up to the prostrate Indian. The Indian took his arm from his face, and grunted, but his swollen mouth refused to form words. He made a strangling noise.

"Thirstin' to death," said the Cowboy. "I've saw 'em in that fix before. I'll go back an' get him some water, an' he'll be all right in an hour."

"I'll go for the water and bring my car," offered the Tenderfoot.

At the cabin the Tenderfoot started the car while the Cowboy put in a canteen and a granite cup. They went back to the Indian, and the Cowboy, propping him up, held a cup of water to his lips.

"Hey," called the Tenderfoot, "don't give him all that water at once. You'll kill him."

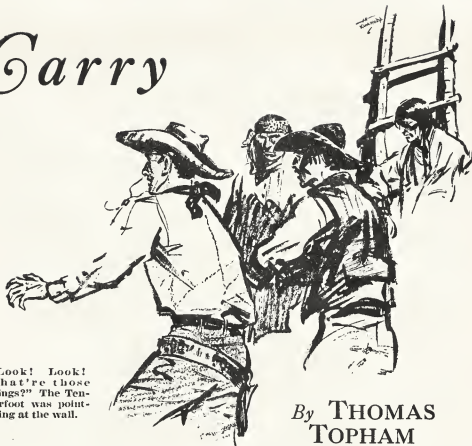
"Huh!" The Cowboy continued to keep the cup to the Indian's mouth. "What this bird needs is water, an' a lot of it. What would he do if he struck a water-hole? Lay down an' lap it dry, an' he wouldn't die, either."

HE must have been right, for the Indian didn't die. After a few painful attempts, he got water in his mouth and gulped down not only the one cupful, but another. Then, one on each side, they lifted him up to put him into the car. He grunted, tried to talk, but they shoved him in and made for the cabin. The Tenderfoot opened the door.

"Don't put him on your bed," warned the Cowboy, "unless you want it covered with cooties."

The Tenderfoot hastily slammed the door. They laid the Indian on an old, broken-down bed on a disused screened porch into which sand had drifted in piles. The Tenderfoot dragged out an old blanket and tossed it on the bed. The Cowboy put a bucket of water and the cup on the floor, and they went out. The Indian grunted and rolled over on his stomach.

Carry



"Look! Look! What're those things?" The Tenderfoot was pointing at the wall.

By THOMAS
TOPHAM

The Cowboy caught his horse, and giving him a spank, sent him to the doorway. "This damn' saddle's comin' to pieces," he complained; "an' no money to buy a new one. I'd lock my door to-night if I was you, but you'll probably find that Injun gone tomorrer. He'll sneak out sometime during the night, when he gets filled up good on water and grub. Hard-lookin' specimen. Don't leave anything around loose or it might go with the Injun. I'll drop around tomorrer. 'By, Tenderfoot."

"Good-by, Cowboy."

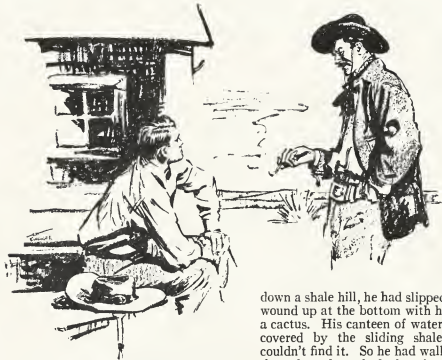
The Cowboy swung to his saddle, and his horse danced off down the rock driveway. The Tenderfoot took a peep at the Indian, who was lying on the bed, motionless. When he had prepared his supper, the Tenderfoot took some food to his patient, and put it on a box by the bed. The Indian looked at it, grunted, and closed his eyes. But when the Tenderfoot went back an hour later, some of the food was gone.

The Tenderfoot sat out beside the cabin door and watched the stars come out until the desert sky was blazing. He had never seen such brilliant stars anywhere. The desert, he had to admit, was

gorgeous, but too monotonous. He would be glad when the doctor said that he had had enough dry air and could go home. But he would miss his friend the Cowboy, who frequently rode over from a ranch ten miles away to poke fun at his tenderfoot ways and drink coffee with him—also, though the Tenderfoot didn't know it, to see that nothing happened to him in the lonely deserted ranchhouse where he was "batching" for his health.

A rustle in the sand warned the Tenderfoot that night denizens of the desert were abroad. One of those malignant sidewinders might come sliding by. He got up, drew a flashlight from his pocket, and lighted his way inside, where he applied a match to an old-fashioned kerosene lamp. Then he locked up carefully, even taking inside the tin soap-box from the shelf over the bench. He listened at the screen porch, heard the Indian toss on his old bed.

THE Tenderfoot was up with the blazing sun the next morning, and went to the screened porch. The old Indian was sitting on the bed, stark naked and miserable, and all his clothes were in a dirty heap on the floor.



"How's your Injun, Tenderfoot? Did he blow last night?"

"How you feeling?" asked the Tenderfoot, somewhat surprised, after what the Cowboy had said, that he was still there. "Cactus, she stick."

The Tenderfoot took a closer look, and saw that the naked back was covered with cactus-needle sores. The old Indian was trying to pick some of the thorns out of his leg. The Tenderfoot didn't wonder that he had grunted when they had loaded him into the automobile. Some of the places were badly infected. The Tenderfoot cursed.

"Indian," he said, "you've let me in for a hell of a job. How'd you do all this?"

In halting English, the Indian began an explanation, but the Tenderfoot stopped him. "Will you let me fix you up?" he asked. "Medicine. Fix sore places."

The Indian nodded. He understood "medicine." It was a distasteful job, but the Tenderfoot got his emergency kit from the automobile and went to work. With a pair of pliers he pulled out the cactus thorns he could reach, while the Indian grunted and smiled ferociously. He opened the infected places, swabbed them with iodine, and put on gauze dressings. The Indian showed his appreciation by a series of grunts and an attempt to talk. "Me die," he said; "you help. *Mucho*." Then he launched into the story of his misadventure.

He had started for Barstow, a desert town, from "way over," which he indicated by a wave of his hand. In going

down a shale hill, he had slipped, and had wound up at the bottom with his back in a cactus. His canteen of water had been covered by the sliding shale, and he couldn't find it. So he had walked on for three days through the burning desert—a marvel of endurance in itself, if true—and had struck the road to the cabin. He had seen the cabin from a distance and was making for it, hoping to find water. But his strength had given out, and he had lain down to die.

The Tenderfoot did not believe the Indian had walked three days without water, and expressed his disbelief; but the Indian solemnly held up three fingers and insisted it was true.

The Tenderfoot gave the Indian a cup of coffee and some breakfast. The Indian lay down and went to sleep.

IN the afternoon the Cowboy rode up. "How's your Injun, Tenderfoot?" he asked, dismounting at the cabin door. "Did he blow last night?"

"My Indian!" exclaimed the Tenderfoot. "He's as much yours as mine. Blow, hell! He's still here." The Tenderfoot explained what had happened to the Indian. The Cowboy, followed by the Tenderfoot, went in and looked at the Indian, who sat up and fixed his beady eyes on his two visitors. "It sure was a terrible job fixing him up," said the Tenderfoot disgustedly. "I'll bet he had a hundred cactus spikes in his hide."

"More or less," grinned the Cowboy. "One is plenty to raise hell. So he set on a cactus, heh? That's a hell of a trick for an Injun to do. What're you goin' to do with the cuss now? Adopt him?"

"I guess I'll have to let him stay till he's better." The Tenderfoot rubbed the

stubble of beard on his chin and regarded the Indian rather morosely. "If he'd wash his face and comb that mop of hair, he'd look more human."

The Indian looked at them gravely, fixing his eyes first on one, then the other. He reached in the pocket of his tattered overalls, took out something. "You help me," he said; "me help you. You need some these?" He handed the thing he had taken from his pocket to the Tenderfoot. It was a gold nugget the size of a walnut.

The Tenderfoot looked at the nugget, then at the Cowboy. "Is that gold or iron pyrites?" he asked.

"Gold," said the Cowboy, taking the nugget. "He picked it up somewhere out in the desert. Say, Injun, where you get this? Where you find?"

"Lots," said the Indian. "You help me. Give you lots like him. What you carry. Sack." He waved his hand toward Shadow Mountain. "Way over."

"I'll be damned," swore the Cowboy. "Say, Tenderfoot, mebbe we've struck it rich." The Cowboy sat back on his haunches and turned the gold nugget over and over in his hand. "Um. I've heard that Indians come into Barstow every once in a while an' trade off nuggets for supplies. Some desert rats have tried to foller 'em, but always got throwed off the trail. Yeah, an' I've heard too that some of them desert rats has disappeared follerin' the Injuns. Old Jim Foster, a one-legged prospector, never did come back. Everybody thinks them Injuns get the stuff in Death Valley, but there aint no placers in the Valley—not this kinda stuff, anyway. Then there's an old story that Death Valley Scotty got in thick with Injuns an' gets his gold from them. Wonder if this feller would take us there?"

"I didn't know there were many Indians around here," said the Tenderfoot.

"There aint many," said the Cowboy, "but they're scattered here an' there—those that refuse to stay on reservations. He might be a Soboba—there's some around San Jacinto; or he might be a Nevada guy. We don't care what he is, if he'd show us where he got this stuff."

THE Tenderfoot made signs to the Indian. "You take us there?" he asked, pointing at the gold.

The Indian nodded vigorously in assent. "You take sack," he said. He gazed around through the screened porch and pointed at the automobile. "Take

him, take sack, come 'long. Give what you carry." Then he covered his eyes with his hands. "You no see, beh?" He took an old greasy rag from the floor, put it over his eyes like a blindfold. "You no see. Savvy?"

"By God," said the Tenderfoot excitedly, "he says he'll take us there, and we can have what we can pack off, but we've got to be blindfolded. What do you make of that?"

"Probably get us nicely blindfolded and then knock us in the head for you pullin' out them cactuses." The Cowboy grinned at the thought. "It must have hurt like the devil. But at that, I'd take a hell of a chance for all the gold I could carry. Besides, we might spot the place, an' go take it all."

EVIDENTLY the Indian understood English better than they realized, for he caught the drift of the Cowboy's remarks. "No kill you," he said seriously. "Lots men killed." He held up his two hands twice, flexed the fingers.

"Twenty?" asked the astonished Cowboy.

"Uh-huh." The Indian nodded.

"He says twenty men have died lookin' for that gold," said the Cowboy. "Well, Tenderfoot, do you want to add us to that gang of gold-crazy birds? Wonder if they just died, or the Injuns caught 'em an'—an'—"

"And bumped 'em off," supplied the Tenderfoot. "How much gold could a guy carry?"

"Boy, I can lug a hundred pounds, anyway, mebbe more," declared the Cowboy. "An' you, well, mebbe eighty. But we'd divide fifty-fifty."

"Let's see, gold's worth, roughly, around thirty-four an ounce," computed the Tenderfoot. "We ought to carry out around fifty thousand dollars' worth apiece. Not bad."

"I'm for it," said the Cowboy. "Sounds crazy, but I think we ought to give it a whirl. Say, I could get me a new pair of boots an' a new saddle—that saddle of mine's about all in." He turned to the Indian. "You take us? We do it." He covered his eyes.

The Indian nodded. He touched his back with a thumb. "*Mañana*. Me sore."

"Tomorrow it is," agreed the Cowboy. "He may be stallin', Tenderfoot, but I'm willin' to take a chance if you are. An' Tenderfoot, there is gold in them thar hills, just like the desert rats say. Plenty of it. I guess the boss will let me off a

coupla days—aint much doin', but I'll beat it an' hunt up them cows, so he won't have no excuse. I'll get one of the boys to drive me over tomorrer mornin' in the boss' car. Got plenty water to take in your car?"

"Yes."

The Tenderfoot questioned the Indian again. Yes, there was no doubt as to what he meant. The Indian offered to take them where they could get gold nuggets such as he had, and allow them to take away what they could carry. It would take them two, possibly three days. They could go fairly close to the place in the automobile, and then must make a long walk over the desert wastes. "Take sacks," the Indian insisted.

AT five next morning the Cowboy was at the Tenderfoot's shack. One of the men drove him over in a car, turned and went back. The Cowboy had the two stout grain-sacks.

The Indian was much better, and ate all the Tenderfoot's eggs for breakfast. The Tenderfoot strapped on a revolver. "Where's your gun, Cowboy?" he asked.

"Shucks, I forgot it!" replied the Cowboy. "The boss don't like us to carry 'em, an' I got out of the habit. Well, one gun's enough."

They loaded the Tenderfoot's automobile with canned food, a camp gasoline stove, and water, and left. The Indian sat in the back seat and held himself propped by a hand on each side. He directed them along a road to Mirage Lake. They passed over its dry surface and glittering mirages, and took a road at the north end. "Toward Randsburg," said the Cowboy. "Gold country, all right."

But the Indian had them turn off and take another road that twisted and

wound through the brush. "Looks like Kramer Hills, but 'taint," observed the Cowboy. They drove for seven hours, taking branching roads. "Glad we brought along that extra gas," said the Tenderfoot. The traveling was not bad, and only once did they have to get out their shovel and dig themselves out. Finally they reached what looked like a better-traveled road deep in low hills.

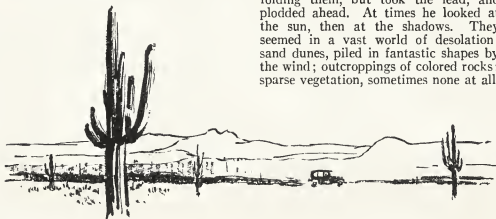
"I think," said the Cowboy, "that this is a road that goes down into Death Valley. It looks like people go by here pretty regular."

The Indian began anxiously scanning the country for landmarks. He halted them several times, got out and limped around. Finally he pointed to a dry wash. "There," he said, and indicated they should drive in. They stopped, and after some work with the shovel ran the car into the wash. The Cowboy and the Tenderfoot moved boulders out of the way, and got the car around a bend that hid it from the road. "Sleep here," announced the Indian.

"I'm lost," confessed the Cowboy as they made preparations to camp. "I thought I could keep myself straight. I did do it as long as I could see Pilot's Knob, but he run us into a sink, an' when we come up ag'in it was gone. I guess I could get out from here by just goin' south on that road, but I don't believe I could ever get back."

IT was barely light when they were up the next morning, had breakfast and strapped on canteens, prepared for their walk. The Indian, in answer to a question as to how far it was, made a sign beside a bush, showing how far the shadow would be when they arrived. They guessed it as earlier than noon.

The Indian said nothing about blind-folding them, but took the lead, and plodded ahead. At times he looked at the sun, then at the shadows. They seemed in a vast world of desolation: sand dunes, piled in fantastic shapes by the wind; outcroppings of colored rocks; sparse vegetation, sometimes none at all.



"Boy, our lives depend on how good this Injun is," said the Cowboy. "We couldn't never get out of this by ourselves. This is desert that *is* desert."

At ten o'clock they suddenly rounded a bend in a deep wash up which they were toiling and came upon another Indian sitting against the side of the wash in the shade. The Indian they were with sat down beside him; and they talked in guttural sounds. They talked a long time. The Cowboy and the Tenderfoot got tired, squatted in the shade of the wall, and drank water. The old Indian got up, took off his tattered shirt and showed the other Indian his back. Evidently he was explaining his rescue by the two white men. The newly acquired Indian walked over to them, stuck out his hand and said: "How do!"

They shook hands. Their new acquaintance put his hands to his eyes. The Tenderfoot took two clean handkerchiefs from his pocket. "I fixed for that," said the Tenderfoot. "I didn't want to be blindfolded with that old Indian's shirt-tail."

The younger Indian pointed at the Tenderfoot's revolver. The old Indian pointed also, indicating a place by the bank of the wash. "You leave," he said. The Tenderfoot looked at the Cowboy, who nodded. "Guess we'll have to do it," he said.

The Tenderfoot put down the revolver, and the old Indian carefully built a shelter of flat rocks over it. The Tenderfoot felt better. That might mean that the old Indian expected him to recover his revolver.

"This ringin' in of another Injun an' leavin' your gun aint so hot," remarked the Cowboy. "I never thought about that. All we can do is go on, or grab your gun an' tell 'em to take us out. They might not do it an' then where'd we be? This new Injun here, he's been watchin'. Must be some more around."

The Tenderfoot was nervous too. He spoke to the old Indian. "Look here," he said apprehensively, "we're not looking for trouble. You invited us to come. Savvy? We're not looking for your gold unless you want to take us. Understand?"

He wondered how much the Indian did understand. Evidently he understood something of what had been said, for he essayed a smile that he apparently thought was reassuring. He put a thumb to his back. "You help," he said. "Me no kill." Then he touched the sack the Tenderfoot had. "Fill um up."



"I'm willin' to take a chance," said the Cowboy. "I've heard that when an Injun is grateful he's damn' grateful, an' would give you his eyeteeth. Le's blind-fold."

"All right." The Tenderfoot put a handkerchief over the Cowboy's eyes and tied it. Then he bound his own eyes. The old Indian felt the bandages and was apparently satisfied. Each Indian grasped a white man by the arm and began guiding him.

"Well, 'by, Tenderfoot," jeered the Cowboy. "We get knocked off now any time."

It was easier walking blindfolded than they had expected. Their guides seemed adept in missing obstructions. For one thing, virtually all of the desert vegetation had disappeared. They stopped once for water, stopped again and they heard a rattlesnake's warning. They stood still, blindfolded, but they didn't know whether the Indians killed the snake or chased it away. Then they walked again. They must have been walking an hour, the Tenderfoot surmised, when they halted and their guides took off the handkerchiefs.

THEY were in a cañon down which came a trickle of water. Stunted trees grew there; a species of grass too, and standing under the trees the Tenderfoot counted twelve Indians. Some of them had rifles. They said nothing.

The two Indians who had been their guides talked to the twelve, all of them now drawn into a circle, sitting on their haunches. The old Indian whom they had saved took off his shirt again and exhibited his sores. Then he stalked over to the white men. "All right," he said. "No see again, heh?"

Illustrated
by Peter
Kuhlhoff



"Dropum gun!" came
like a shot from the
Indian.

The Tenderfoot blindfolded the Cowboy and himself. They were guided forward; they stumbled over rocks now and knew they were going deeper into the canyon. Then the handkerchiefs were removed and they blinked in the semi-darkness of a huge cave. The light of torches held by Indians flickered on the walls, and suddenly the Tenderfoot gasped. The light threw flashes on what looked like gold nuggets imbedded in the walls.

"Look!" he gasped at the Cowboy.

"Yeah," said the Cowboy, and fishing in a pocket, he brought out a package of cigarettes. "I've heard of this joint, but never believed it. Plenty gold. Easy to get. The old coot's going to keep his word. That new saddle of mine is gonna be a honey."

"Look! Look! What're those things?"

THE Tenderfoot was pointing at the wall across from them.

"Funny-lookin' things," said the Cowboy. "They look like men hangin' up there." He stepped over and came back in a leap. "God Almighty, Tenderfoot, they *are* men. Dead men! Mummified!" The cigarette dropped out of the Cowboy's fingers. "Sixteen men on a dead man's chest." The Cowboy laughed in a trembling falsetto, entirely unlike his usual laugh.

The Tenderfoot grasped the Indian by the arm. "Who—who are they?" he stammered.

"They hunt gold," said the old Indian in a matter-of-fact voice. "Killed. Look. Show something." He went over to the wall of the dead men, swinging there in the cave.

"Eighteen," said the Cowboy. "I just counted them." His first horror over, his curiosity was aroused and he stepped over again to the wall. The Tenderfoot was sitting on a rock, sick. He looked up, white-faced, as the Cowboy came back. "Old Jim Foster, that one-legged desert rat, is there," croaked the Cowboy. "I knew him. Swingin' there, old Jim. Jest swingin'! They're white men, Tenderfoot, white men who were lookin' for this gold."

"You mean the Indians killed them?"

"Yes. Then hung 'em up in here. They would just shrivel up in this dry desert air, protected from animals. They've got a great collection, I'll tell the world."

The Tenderfoot jumped at a touch on his arm. The old Indian was standing beside them again. He held out a paper. "Ketch um," he said. "She write. Here."

The Tenderfoot took the piece of paper the old fellow held out; another Indian held a torch. The Cowboy leaned over his shoulder, and there they read:



May ? 1914. Caught by Indans, looken for Cave of Gold. Found it but Indans caught me. Millions in gold. Don't know what they will do but mabe kill me. They have kill nine, bodies in cave. If I get out will be rich. If anybody finds this pleas notefy my famly in San Berdoo. Sam Wright.

The old Indian stalked over and pointed at one of the swinging bodies. "That's Sam, I guess," said the Cowboy.

The Tenderfoot groaned. "Do you suppose they led us in here to see all this, and then kill us? God, what fools we were to trust an Indian!"

"Maybe not," said the Cowboy. "The old duck seems to have considerable influence. What next?"

"The next is to get out of here—if we can," said the Tenderfoot.

"With what we can carry," said the Cowboy softly. He shook his sack at the old Indian. "How about it, old scout?"

"I'm not taking anything," declared the Tenderfoot, his eyes on the swinging dead men. "Eighteen of them. Good God! Hung up there to dry and guard the gold. It's—why, it's incredible. I'll see that these Indians get—"

"Shut up, Tenderfoot," interrupted the Cowboy. "They may savvy more talk than you think. An' you've got to load up your sack, or we won't get out. They'll

think we've spotted the place an' are comin' back, unless we play the game. Pull yourself together."

The Tenderfoot got up from the rock. "You're right," he muttered. "Eighteen dead men swinging in a cave. Gold, gold everywhere, under foot, above, all around. Millions in gold. Damn it, Cowboy, I'm going crazy."

"Have a cigarette," said the Cowboy in a matter-of-fact voice. He took one from his package, stuck it between the Tenderfoot's trembling lips, lighted a match.

The Tenderfoot inhaled deeply, once, twice, three times, and threw the cigarette away.

The flickering light played on the eighteen dead men, made them look more grotesque than they were. Dead faces, shriveled like masks, stared out of the shadows at them, seemed leering at the fantastic idea of taking gold from that place. Some hung with their heads down as if the sight of the gold they had vainly sought was too much. One had fallen and lay, a heap of bones and parchment. The mummy of an old man with whiskers and wild, flowing hair stared with sightless eyes across to the gold-studded wall opposite.

AS the Tenderfoot looked at what had once been men, the insane idea came to him that if they could only come to life they could all march out carrying gold. He flung his arm across his eyes, turned his back to the dead men. That way lay insanity.

"Shriveled and dried," he croaked. "Watching the gold. Why couldn't nature be kind and turn them back to dust? Better be eaten by coyotes. All right, Cowboy. I'm okay. The next move is up to you."

The Cowboy caught the old Indian's eye, pointed at his sack. The Indian motioned to the wall opposite the dead men. The Cowboy picked up a rock and dislodged a cascade of gold nuggets. They were imbedded in the wall in layers. It was an old stream bed laid down in past ages, upheaved, and cut through by a newer and smaller stream, leaving the stratified old stream-bed as the walls of the cave. In the excitement of picking up gold they almost forgot the eighteen dead men staring at their backs.

They filled their sacks, stuffed what they could in their pockets. The Indians began going out. The Cowboy tried to



"You come
back, me kill.
... Hang up."

lift his sack and had to throw out handfuls of nuggets. He groaned in abject misery. The Tenderfoot found himself in the same predicament. When they were able to lift their sacks the old Indian indicated they must blindfold themselves.

The Tenderfoot and the Cowboy found themselves again looking at the row of dead gold-seekers. "The old man there is laughing at us, Cowboy," cried the Tenderfoot, half hysterically. "He's laughing to think what fools we are. Laughing. See him? Laughing." The Tenderfoot laughed, too, a giggle that sounded obscene in that cave of death and gold.

The Cowboy breathed deeply. "Good-by, Jim Foster," he said huskily. "Keep on smilin', boy. It's all you can do." Then, brusquely, "Come on, Tenderfoot. We'll go crazy if we keep on talkin' to these dead men. Where's that handkerchief?"

Blindfolded, they picked up their sacks of gold and staggered out, an Indian holding the arm of each. Again the handkerchiefs were taken off their eyes, again they stood in the sunlight of the cañon, again Indians were standing under the stunted trees.

The Indians walked solemnly past them, each stuck out a dirty hand, shook hands, said, "How do!" and passed on. Then their eyes were behind the handkerchiefs, and they were stumbling along in the hands of their guides.

It was a hard trip back, loaded as they were. Once the Tenderfoot thought he must throw away some of his gold, but his Indian guide took the sack for a time. At last they reached the point where the Tenderfoot's revolver had been hidden. The blindfolds came off. The old Indian took up the revolver and gave it to the Tenderfoot. The added burden was too much. The Tenderfoot threw the revolver away. It was that or its weight in gold. The old Indian retrieved the revolver and hid it in his clothes. The old Indian's companion

simply faded away while they were not looking, and the three resumed their journey toward the automobile.

The old Indian again led the way and the Cowboy and the Tenderfoot staggered behind him. The sun was fast sinking when they came in sight of the car. Two men were sitting beside it. Surprised, they halted. "Some lost guys," said the Cowboy. "Probably waitin' for us to get back so they can get some water. Bet they've drained the radiator."

As they approached closer they saw that the door of their car had been pried open.

The two men got to their feet.

"Hello," the Tenderfoot greeted them as they came up and he swung his sack to the ground with a thump.

"Hello." Then the Tenderfoot, the Cowboy, and the old Indian were looking into revolvers the two men held. "Throw up your hands," they were ordered.

Hands went up. "What you got in them sacks?" asked one of the men, and opened the Tenderfoot's. "Good God, Pete, it's full of gold!"

Pete waved the three prisoners to step back a short distance while he looked. The two men went almost insane. When they had calmed down Pete spoke. "Well, they musta got it out of a mine," he said, "an' the thing to do is take 'em right back to it. Did we strike it rich, Bill, I ask you. Did we?"

"We don't know where it is," spoke up the Cowboy.

"Yeah?" said Bill. "Well, you will know. The Injun knows, I'll gamble on that. In fact, it aint no gamble. He knows. A few twists an' a coupla burns on his feet will make him savvy plenty what we want."

The two men openly discussed their plans. They were going to bury the gold that the Cowboy and the Tenderfoot had brought back, then force the prisoners to guide them to the place where they had obtained it.

The Cowboy and the Tenderfoot both realized that they would probably be tortured in the effort to force them to be guides; then later they would undoubtedly be killed.

"We'll have to spend the night here an' git goin' early tomorrer," said Pete. "Bill, git that rope out of our car an' we'll tie their hands behind 'em."

Bill went to their ramshackle car parked behind a sand dune and came

back with the rope. Pete took his eyes from his prisoners as Bill handed him the rope and negligently lowered his gun.

"Drop um gun!" came like a shot from the Indian, and both men, startled, looked into a revolver that the Indian was holding trained on them.

Pete dropped his revolver into the sand, and both men put up their hands.

"Well, Injun, you got us," Pete spoke jovially. "Good joke on us."

"Good joke. Yeah, swell," said the Cowboy. "Thank God, Tenderfoot, that the old Indian picked up your gun."

The old Indian moved warily behind the two outlaws, picked up the gun from the sand, removed Bill's gun from his holster.

"Here, toss me one of them guns," said the Cowboy.

"Me keep um," said the Indian.

The Cowboy started toward the Indian, but stopped as the Indian pointed a revolver directly at him. The Indian had a steely glitter in his eyes. "Me keep um," he repeated.

The old Indian waved a gun toward the road. "Get out," he said. "That way. You find um big road. All right. You come back, me kill. . . . Hang up. Me keep thees men."

The Tenderfoot started forward, horrified. "You can't do that," he cried. "We'll take them to jail. God, man, you can't take them back there."

But the old Indian was an entirely different Indian from the one they had known. "Me keep um," he repeated, and his eyes were implacable, cruel. "They kill you, me. Me hang um up."

"Injun, don't pull a trick like that," pleaded the Cowboy.

"What—what's he gonna do?" asked Pete.

"I don't know," said the Cowboy. He couldn't tell those men what he knew.

The Tenderfoot again started forward, but the Cowboy grasped his arm. "Don't be a fool," he warned. "He's paid his debt to us an' now he'd kill us all if he thought he had to."

THE Tenderfoot went no farther after another look into the Indian's glittering eyes. The Indian poked one, then the other, of the outlaws in the back with his revolvers. "You, march. Quick. Me shoot."

The outlaws stepped forward while the Cowboy and the Tenderfoot, fascinated, watched them go. "You come, kill," said

the Indian as he passed them. "You get out."

They turned a bend in the wash, were lost to view. The Tenderfoot cursed in a long-drawn wail and dropped to the sand.

"We'll follow them," he cried wildly, starting up. "We can't let him do that. They'll hang them up—they'll—"

The Tenderfoot started up the wash. But the Cowboy grabbed him and pulled him back. "What you want to do, Tenderfoot?" he demanded. "Get yourself hung up in that cave? We're as helpless as two babes in the woods—a damn' sight more so! We can get out from here, but if we get a mile off this road we're lost."

"Twenty," croaked the Tenderfoot.

"Yes, twenty," repeated the Cowboy.

"Every ounce of that stuff is cursed," said the Tenderfoot.

The Cowboy stood and looked reflectively, sadly, at the two bags of gold while he slowly fished for his cigarettes. He took one out, tapped it daintily on his wrist, lighted it. "I could make my old saddle last a couple more years," he said.

The Tenderfoot reached for the shovel, tested the sand. "Here's a nice soft spot, right here," he said, and began to dig.

"Save them sacks, Tenderfoot," sang out the Cowboy. "I got to return 'em to the old man at the ranch."



The Murder

This novelette is a detective story without a detective in it—and a fascinating mystery by the gifted author of "My Corpse Hangs in the Barn."

Illustrated by
Charles Chickering



THAT was March of the year when something that was poisonous seemed to be working in the world. In China and in Spain men were dark-hearted; strange flags betokening stranger faiths were flying; and fear came that March to my cousin Hester McCaw. She was an old woman, blind with great age; and when her wire reached me at the *Dispatch* office, I called in my news editor and told him the paper was his to manage for a few days.

Driving to the village of Turnford was like journeying back twenty-five years into my childhood. Many were the halcyon summers I had spent there, before the shadows had fallen across the map of the world, before I had drunk the dark wine of success. My second cousin, Max McCaw, and I used to swim in the brown waters of Spring Creek, and drown out gophers, and climb the loftiest pines on the ridge, pretending they were the masts of argosies. Even then he was a wild, dark, handsome fellow—my cousin Max.

Turnford lay in a cuplike valley, encircled by hills like dwarf mountains;

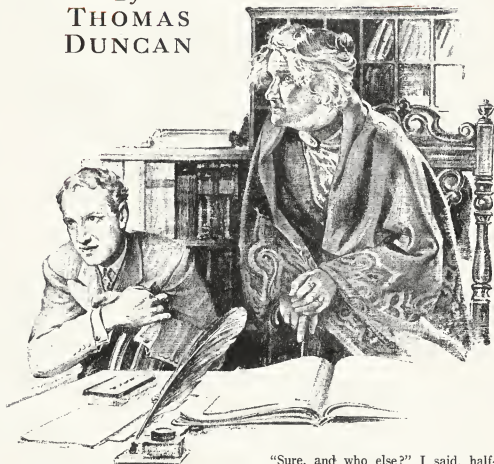
and once men had entertained great hopes for the village. It was to become the peer of famous resorts—Hot Springs, and White Sulphur Springs and Saratoga. And that would enrich my cousin Hester, because she owned the Tavern, where men, bloated up with gout or grimacing with bone-misery, came to take the healing waters.

But like so many towns with fine futures, Turnford disappointed its enthusiasts. The waters were indeed healthful, but the climate was too contrary for a resort—blistering in July, ringing cold in January. You didn't hear much about Turnford any more.

The air was raw enough that late afternoon when I came over the high ridges and sighted the town. The skies were

of *Hester* *McCaw*

By
THOMAS
DUNCAN



full of clouds, slaty and solid-looking, like the slag-heaps of coal-mines; and already, in the valley, the shadowy dregs of day had gathered. As I maneuvered the car down the long, twisting road into the village, lights twinkled on; and it was dusk when I halted outside the great frame hotel. Sadness ate at the heart of me as I mounted the rotting steps to the long veranda, so empty and ruined now, and opened the door to the lobby.

ON the desk burned a smoky oil lamp; and behind the desk sat my cousin Hester, her hair a brilliant Irish white, her handsome face fallen and caved in by the treacherous years.

"Is it you, Charles Mahoney?" she asked, at sound of the door's opening.

"Sure, and who else?" I said, half-jokingly dropping into the brogue that my tongue had been made to speak.

"You're a good boy to come, and I'm needing you. . . . And is it so ugly I've grown that you won't be kissing me?"

So I embraced her, very gently because her bones were brittle with the years; and after she had heard about my wife and all the fist-fights my two young sons had enjoyed before they could run our neighborhood, she chuckled.

"It puts me in mind of you and Max—always fightin' the lads of this town."

"And licking them."

"Aye!" And her unseeing eyes glistened in the lamplight, for Max was her great sorrow. Then she composed herself and said, very calmly:

"I sent for you, Charles Mahoney, because I am going to die."



Max
McCaw

"Not you," I said. "You've never looked better—"

She shook her head. "It won't be the Lord who'll be taking my life, but the devil himself."

I tried to laugh, as I took her hand, crisscrossed with wrinkles and purple-veined, and patted it.

"What talk!"

"Laugh if you like," she murmured, "but it will come. There's an uneasiness in my bones, Charles Mahoney; and the feel of death's in the air, and the wind in the gables talks about it at night."

"It's living alone that's put strange thoughts into your brain. And thinking too much."

She shook her head.

"You need a rest," I said. "You need to get away from this place."

"I need nothing of the kind. This is my home, and here I'll stay." And she added:

"I'm a doomed old woman, Charles Mahoney. I've an enemy in this town, and I'll be slain for having him."

"An enemy? But who—"

SHE shook her head again. She was very old, very difficult.

"If I knew his name or the color of his hair, I could pray against him. I know neither. But an enemy I have, and he'll be the death of me. I feel his hate pouring over me in waves. There are things you can't put into words, Charles, things you can only feel and fear. . . . It may not come tonight or tomorrow, but come it will; and I wanted to be talking with you again while my tongue will still move."

I said: "If you could give me some idea—"

"How can I be doing that?" she snapped crossly. "Every soul in Turnford is my friend—aye, and mayhap my enemy. . . . But here we are talking away the supper-hour, and you hungry after your drive." She grasped her cane, and with a rustling of layer upon layer of underskirts, rose to her feet. "I'll be setting you on some victuals," she said.

So she was mad at last, my cousin Hester! That was my thought as I held the lamp high and followed her. I had read my modern psychology, and I knew how a persecution-complex can victimize a mind. And this poor old soul had suffered enough, what with the murder of Jacob Wertleim beneath this roof, and the flight of her son Max.

THROUGH the dining-room I followed her—that vast room which once had rung with wineglasses and the laughter of handsome women. Tonight it looked even larger, for the tables and chairs, thickly coated with cobwebs, were all stacked along the walls. Without a false step she found her way to the swinging kitchen doors; and in that room she bustled about as if she had sight, her fingers flying expertly.

Nor would you have guessed she was blind, watching her prepare the steak for the frying-pan, and deftly slicing the bread, and setting the kitchen table. That ramshackle old hotel was her kingdom, and she knew every inch of it.

The mood of fear—valiantly calm fear—with which she had greeted me seemed to pass; many a light jest left her lips; and I grew certain that she had called me back to Turnford for some purpose other than telling me she had an enemy, unknown even to her.

The food was superb, and my long drive had starved me; I ate like a school-boy. A sense of great well-being came over me, enhanced by the apricot brandy with which we topped off the meal. After she had tamped and lit her short-stemmed pipe (she had taken to smoking years before, as a cure for asthma), and I had lit my cigarette, she smiled and said:

"I have great plans, Charles."

"Plans?"

Puffing contentedly, Hester nodded. "You're thinking of what I told you, and you're asking yourself how I can bring myself to plan when there's an enemy's hate upon me." She shrugged. "But

we must plan, Charles Mahoney, till the minute we die. . . . This town has a great future, Charles. A great one. Aye, and the Tavern must lead the way."

So she had never abandoned the sunny dream of Turnford as an opulent watering-place; or possibly she had abandoned it, and now in her dotage returned to it.

Very gently I said: "Times change—you must realize that. Turnford had its day—before there were airplanes to take people to Palm Springs or Saratoga as easily as trains or buggies used to fetch them here."

"Times change—exactly," she chirped. "And if Turnford will change with them—by midsummer we'll have them flocking here. Flocking, Charles. There'll be great cooking in this kitchen again. And cigar-smoke and laughter in the dining-room. Aye. . . . The waters are most healthful, Charles. Millionaires here again—oh, I can tell you there's a future."

It was pitiful, her enthusiasm. Only the very young, whose dreams have not yet been drubbed and smashed, and the very old, who have forgotten how life can explode the soaring Zeppelins of silvery hope, are capable of such unswerving devotion to an enthusiasm. Soon I perceived that it was futile to assault her plans. To my every objection she had a reply: The waters were so healthful, the climate so salubrious, the scenery so ingratiating!

WELL, I could humor her; and that I did.

"How do you plan to go about bringing people here?"

She waved her pipe. "Two things—two things only. First, improvements. Then—publicity."

"But—"

She laughed shortly. "You with your *ifs* and *but's* and doubtings! Where's your spirit, lad? We'll improve this Tavern, and then let the world know. You have a newspaper. You can manage that part. A few photographs. A few mentions in the society columns. Mr. and Mrs. Rich Bondholder and their charming daughter are spending a week at Turnford. . . . That'll bring the small fry flocking."

You can see how she was.

I asked: "What improvements?"

"Simple—so simple that it's ridiculous, Charles. You said times change, and those words are keys unlocking the whole idea. In the old days we conducted a

most sedate establishment. And gradually the customers came no more. Why? Because fine people are no longer sedate. I'm an old woman, and blind; but my mind is sharp. I can smell what's happening in the world. Nowadays people cannot bear to sit quietly and look into their own minds—the thoughts there are that dreadful. They must be carousing and dancing. So we'll give them what their purses want to pay for. We'll remodel the cellar."

"The cellar?"

"And why not? There's ample space. The whole south half of the cellar is idle. It's dark now, with only a dirt floor. But we'll give it a slick waxed floor, plenty of light and a smart bar. Oh, they'll flock here then."

"How much will it cost?"

HESTER shrugged. "That's what Conrad Festner asked, too."

Conrad Festner was president of the Turnford Trust and Savings Bank.

I asked: "You've discussed it with him?"

"Certainly. I asked him if he'd lend me the money. It horrified him. He's an old tight-wad, Charles. So I told him I'd invite you to Turnford. You'd sign my note, wouldn't you?"

She leaned forward, her head advanced, awaiting my reply. I didn't know what to say. She had set her heart on remodeling the Tavern, and the dream of Turnford as a popular resort must have given her great comfort. Yet it was absurd. Utterly. Long ago Turnford had missed the last boat to prosperity.

I hedged: "It sounds promising. Of course, there are many angles. A while ago you said—you have an enemy."

Her tongue touched her lips; she nodded.

"You may be wrong about the enemy," I hurried on, "but suppose you aren't? Wouldn't it be better—and safer—for you to come back home with me and visit us? You'd be away from your enemy then."

Slowly she shook her glistening white head. She was a determined woman.

"No," she murmured, "you can't run away from things like that. They—overtake you. . . . Besides, I want to get the Tavern fixed up bright and fresh—for Max. He'd grow rich, operating it."

So that was it! Max! He would be returning, she imagined, out of the great world into which he had vanished six years ago.



Suddenly he swung his face close to mine and snapped: "You're sure you didn't do it?"

I said: "But Cousin Hester, don't you—remember? Max ran away."

"I remember."

"He can't come back. They'd arrest him for the murder of Jacob Wertleim."

She shook her head. "He didn't murder Jacob Wertleim."

"I don't believe he did, either," I lied. "But Wertleim was murdered—and under this roof."

"Aye."

"And Max ran away that night."

"Aye. . . . But he didn't do it. He'll come back as soon as we prove who did do it."

"After six years—that would be hard. Very hard."

A slow smile parted her lips. "I know who killed Wertleim."

I caught my breath.

"Oh, yes," she went on. "My eyes are useless, but my ears have told me—after these years."

"Who did it?"

The forefinger of her right hand tamped down the ashes in her cold pipe.

"My ears—and your eyes," she murmured. "Together they'll solve that black deed."

"But—how?"

She smiled secretly. "We shall see. . . . He'll be coming here tonight."

I couldn't imagine what she was driving at, and I told her so.

She said: "I've invited him. Him and some others. I told them to come

to say hello to you, Charles. I'll use my ears, and you use your eyes. We shall see." And she added: "They'll be here at eight. What time is it now?"

"Ten of," I said.

REMEMBER 1932? March? And do you remember the murder of Jacob Wertleim? It was a three-day wonder on the newspaper front pages; then, as no new developments came, the story retrogressed to the inner pages, and diminished to a couple of paragraphs; finally it disappeared from print.

But you may not, after all, remember it. A great deal was happening very fast in those days, and Wertleim was not the first financial idol to meet death violently. Only, the others met it on the sidewalks and pavement, after a hasty journey downward from hotel windows; but Wertleim managed to get himself murdered.

Jacob Wertleim was king and emperor in one of those financial empires on which the sun never set in the nineteen-twenties, and on which it failed to shine in the thirties. After his death in March, the empire smashed and another fifty thousand families went on relief.

His secretary always maintained that Wertleim never meant to skip, that he just vanished from New York in order to rest for a few days. He wanted, she said, to think—a process impossible on the Street; he wanted perspective. Perhaps. Let's grant him the benefit of the doubt.

He couldn't have selected a quieter and more out-of-the-way spot than Turnford. He recalled it, his secretary said, from late boyhood—once in its heyday his father and mother had taken him there for a week. So, in that fearful spring of '32, he returned—incognito. Cousin Hester showed me the register—he signed himself as plain John Miller. On his person, and in his Gladstone he carried twelve thousand dollars in currency, most of it in bills of small denomination. His secretary testified to that, later.

He was the first guest the Turnford Tavern had welcomed in weeks—months. Times were awful; there were rumors that the Turnford bank might follow its competitor into insolvency; and Cousin Hester and Max treated him like the harbinger of better days. They ushered him into the presidential suite; Cousin Hester outdid herself in cooking. He lived there three days, a small, dark, uncommunicative man who kept to his room, save for long, silent afternoon strolls about the village. Getting perspective, I suppose.

But he didn't need it. For on the morning of the fourth day they found him dead in his bed, a knife in his heart. Max McCaw's knife—a long "toad-stabber" on whose handle were stamped pictures of the Statue of Liberty and the Empire State Building. Everybody in town knew that knife—that's a village for you. Max had won it on a wheel at the county fair.

No money was found in his suite, and no Max was to be seen in Turnford. He had vanished in the night. People forgot Max's good qualities—he was a good-natured, happy-go-lucky chap—and remembered only the obverse of those qualities: they recalled him as a wild fellow who made love to all the pretty girls and got gallantly drunk and won most of his spending-money at billiards and cards.

Old Cecil Berryfield, the night watchman, reported seeing a shadowy figure who might have been Max sneaking into a box car at three A. M., when a freight train halted for water.

THE State authorities were not excited about this murder of an obscure John Miller. The metropolitan papers gave it a half-stick of type. Jacob Wertleim's secretary saw one of those stories and expressed the fear that John Miller was her employer. After that, the deluge.

A nationwide search was conducted for Max McCaw; in Maine and Louisiana, in Oregon and Florida, young men who might have been Max—but weren't—were arrested and then released; finally the case sank deep into public forgetfulness and was talked of no more.

IN March the wind is never quiet for long; when Cousin Hester and I returned to the lobby, I could hear it sniffing and whining on the veranda like a stray and ragged pup. Setting the lamp on the desk, I shook down the stove and poured in more coal, encouraging it to battle back the chill in that great room. Before I had finished, feet crossed the veranda and the threshold, and I shook hands with the first guests, Conrad Festner, president of the Turnford Trust and Savings Bank, and his son Paul.

At sixty-odd, Conrad Festner was a big-framed man whose height was topped by a wavy thicket of iron-gray hair. Nose-glasses flashed before his gray eyes, and the skin of his broad face was putty-colored. Despite his size, I sensed as always a softness at the core of the man; he was something of a donkey. He took my hand in both of his big mellow paws and said in a creamy voice:

"Charles! Charles Mahoney! You are a stranger around here, and it's good to see you."

Then he beamed at Cousin Hester and added: "And I'll wager Mrs. McCaw is happy to have you here."

"I wouldn't have sent for him if I hadn't wanted him," she snapped.

Scarcely more than half his father's size was Paul Festner, a small-boned chap in his thirties, with smooth dark hair and a smooth dark mustache. His horn-rimmed glasses and shy manner reminded you of a scholar who had been lost for weeks in the stacks of a vast library. We shook hands briefly, and all of us sat down, our conversation considerably restricted by the polite necessity of avoiding mention of Max McCaw.

The elder Festner smiled benignly at me. "Mrs. McCaw tells me that she wants to remodel the Tavern. Has she discussed it with you?"

"That's why she sent for me."

"And what is your opinion of the project?"

"He likes it," Cousin Hester broke in.

Festner's brows went up; then he smiled that indulgent, mushy smile; and he took advantage of Hester's blindness to shake his head at me. He seemed to



Cecil
Berryfield

be saying wordlessly: "Oh, come now. You and I know that she's so old that her judgment in these matters isn't to be trusted. It would be nice to humor her, but when it comes to spending money on a wild project like remodeling the Tavern—well, we just can't."

THE smugness of his superior attitude irked me sorely. It roused in me a juvenile perverseness, and I found myself saying:

"I think it's a swell idea."

"You do?"

"Wonderful. There's no reason at all why Turnford can't become a famous resort."

Paul Festner chose this moment to put in his dime's worth.

"Don't be silly about it, Charles."

Those were irritating words, and I longed to lift Paul off his chair and give him a swift kick. I remembered from boyhood how obnoxious he had been to Max and me—he was always a prim little gentleman. But in civilized society you can't go about kicking people, so I vented my anger in words:

"It isn't silly at all. I've saved up considerable money, and if Hester wants it to remodel the Tavern, she can have it."

A short laugh burst from Hester's lips, and gleefully she smacked her cane against the floor.

"Didn't I tell you?" she demanded of Conrad Festner. "Didn't I say Charles would lend me the money?"

The banker flushed, and with great dignity he said: "It's very foolish. Money down a rat-hole—"

"Wait and see," Hester sang out. "Wait till this lobby is crowded with guests, and an orchestra's playing in the cellar, and people are dancing—"

She was interrupted by the arrival of Cecil Berryfield and Knute Stackpool;

and it occurred to me that Cousin Hester must have deliberately invited here tonight the villagers for whom I had the least liking.

Both men were now in late middle age, and they seemed unsure of themselves; doubtless they wondered why Cousin Hester had invited them to renew their acquaintance with me. Cecil Berryfield, the night watchman, had a short gray mustache; and behind his steel-rimmed glasses his eyes were without humor or warmth.

"I can't stay but a minute," he said, glancing at his thick silver watch as if he were actually going to time himself.

Knute Stackpool had arrayed himself in his Sunday best for this occasion. He was a husky man, and the mail-order house from which he had purchased his dark-gray suit must have sent a size too small: his thick wrists and big hands emerged nakedly from the sleeves, and his trousers failed to cover his ankles. His tan oxfords looked well-made, from expensive leather; but like his suit they seemed too small, and when he walked to a chair, they squeaked.

"We were just talking about remodeling the Tavern," Hester said. "Charles is going to lend me the money."

Stackpool stared at her. He had a long horse face, and his eyes were black beneath coal-black brows.

"How do you mean—remodel?" he asked in a deep voice that reverberated through the shadowy lobby.

She explained. He listened, thumbing his heavy jaw, which hung slightly ajar; and when she had finished painting that bright dream, he wagged his head in a dour negative and announced:

"It aint practical."

"Nothing ventured, nothing gained."

"Just the same, it aint at all practical."

So that argument was resumed, with everybody freely airing his views about what was, after all, Cousin Hester's own affair. All of my old dislike for Knute Stackpool surged back. He it was who had once caused my arrest.

That was a long time ago, when Max and I were twelve or fourteen. One afternoon very late in the summer we had gone to the woods to roast wienies and catch crawdads; and it was evening, with a red moon rising, when we trudged homeward. We had to pass his house.

It stood on the edge of the village, a small house where he lived alone. Knute Stackpool was a childless widower, supposed to be very wealthy. Certainly he

should have been, for no stingier man ever winced at the agony of parting with a penny. All the boys, naturally, thought him a miser. Maybe he was—I don't know; certainly his miserly instincts were highly developed.

Approaching his house that night, we slowed to a halt, whispering all the tales we had heard of money buried in his yard, and his solitary midnight pleasure in clinking coins and rustling currency. Such worship of money had an obscene quality, verging on black magic, which filled us with uneasiness.

I can see that road now, painted white by the moon, our shadows sharply black. A field of tall corn fringed it, and as we stood there talking courage into each other, I suddenly sensed a presence behind us. I glanced round in time to behold Knute Stackpool striding through a gate from the corn-field.

I let out a yell, and we bounded away.

Max could run like the wind, and he soon left me lagging. Another backward glance showed me Knute Stackpool pursuing, and his long legs easily overtook me. I was scared to death. Like a giant he towered above me, his eyebrows bristling black, his mammoth paws imprisoning my arm.

"What do you want with me?" I screamed.

"You know well enough," he said.

He marched me into town and turned me over to the custody of Cecil Berryfield. And then the reason for my arrest was revealed. Hidden in the middle of that corn-field, Stackpool had a patch of melons; the night before, some had been stolen; and this night, watching for thieves, he had suspected Max and me.

Cousin Hester soon rescued me, delivering a bitter tongue-lashing to Berryfield and Stackpool. I didn't sleep that night, and for weeks I dreamed of a horse-faced giant chasing me through the eerie moonlight. I wondered, now, if the two men remembered that incident.

IF so, they didn't refer to it, because of course that would have involved the mention of Max, and Max was a closed subject, as if he were a rogue who had died decades ago, and had been forgotten by all who lived. . . . Cecil Berryfield tugged out his watch and muttered that he'd have to go, and the other three guests rose with him. We shook hands all around, and they trooped into the windy night, the *squeak-squeak* of Stackpool's oxfords trailing back.

A smile on her lips, Cousin Hester filled her charred pipe.

"Nice friends you have," I said.

She laughed, and once her pipe was alight, she asked: "And which would you say killed Jacob Wertleim?"

I shrugged. "Your guess is as good as mine."

"My guess is better," she declared. "Knute Stackpool did it, of course."

ALL Cousin Hester's conclusions I discounted ninety per cent. In her old age, I thought, her mind had simply refused to accept as fact what had obviously happened—Max's killing Jacob Wertleim and fleeing to the ends of the earth; she had fabricated a dream so that her life might be bearable.

And yet—wasn't it one of those sapient philosophers of China who said that a woman's counsel may be worthless, but the man who heeds it not is a fool? So, there in the lobby, with the wind outside growing more restless, I listened to her version of the crime.

It was pitifully inadequate, her explanation, with one thing only—a sound—that might possibly be construed as a clue. Still, I didn't utterly discount the possibility that she might be correct. There was a tantalizing outside chance that she was right.

On the night of Jacob Wertleim's murder she had slept very heavily, she said; and then suddenly, in the black theater of her sleeping mind, a terrible dream had flashed vividly. She was a young woman again in the dream, and Max a little boy, and she was standing on the sandy beach of a very blue lake, watching him wade. "Not too far, sonny," she warned, but he did not hear. Farther and farther from shore he waded, laughing as he splashed the water with his hands; and suddenly he stepped into a deep hole.

She tried to call for aid, but the words made no sound as they left her lips. Then she tried to plunge into the water to save him, but that paralysis which so frequently atrophies our muscles in nightmares held her rooted in the sand. So there she stood on the beach, hearing his screams and beholding his body sinking.



The dream wakened her; she sat upright in bed, trembling, her fingertips icy. Then reality slowly returned. "What nonsense!" she told herself, lying down again, trying to woo sleep.

As drowsiness advanced over her, she grew conscious of footsteps in the hall. And she thought sleepily that the man who had registered as John Miller must have arisen in the night to take one of his solitary strolls about the village. And he was wearing different shoes. She had never heard his shoes before. But she heard them now. They squeaked.

NEXT morning the hotel was empty of sound. She called Max's name, but he did not reply. She rapped on the door of John Miller's room but there was no response. And then something very odd happened to Hester McCaw. She was not aware, she said, of being afraid. But all at once she began to tremble. Her knees shook, and her lips quivered, and her fingers were so agitated that she dropped her cane. Her body was afraid before her mind. And then the terror ran through her mind, like a cold gale through the smashed windows of an abandoned house. She dropped to her knees and groped for her cane, and with peal after peal of her frightened calls ringing through the empty hotel, she stumbled down the stair and across the lobby to the door, yelling for aid.

Men came and found John Miller murdered, and Max gone. And people said that Max had slain their guest and had fled. But she knew better. Somebody had been a-prowl in the corridors, and his shoes had squeaked. She began to listen for a pair of squeaking shoes. But she held her tongue—she told no one.

People thought her hard-hearted, she supposed, or mad, or both, because she did not wring her hands and deny Max's guilt, because she did not weep. Let them. She knew what she was about. She began to listen—ever to listen—for a pair of squeaking shoes. That very morning she left the hotel and found her way to the Turnford Trust and Savings Bank, where a long line of people were waiting to withdraw their money. Only distantly she heard their whispers—of banks closing everywhere—of this bank rumored to be unsound. What did she care about banks? She was interested in squeaking shoes.

She did not hear them, that morning. She stood by the bank door till the last fearful villager had entered and emerged

with his money, but she heard no squeaks. Of course not. For was not Knute Stackpool a miser? He did not trust banks. For years he had hoarded his money on his own premises; what business would he have in that line of frightened depositors?

Nor did she hear those shoes again for years, though she listened endlessly. Not till last Sunday afternoon. A fine March day it had been, and she sunning herself on the hotel veranda. And suddenly, coming along the street—*squeak, squeak*.

Oh, she was not mistaken; she knew that sound the way a musician knows a particular phrase of music. The squeaks—the selfsame squeaks! As they approached, she said pleasantly:

"Good afternoon."

The man who replied was Knute Stackpool. They chatted for a minute, and he squeaked away. . . . Then Hester McCaw knew that she had found the murderer of Jacob Wertleim; he would be unmasked; Max would return; the hotel would be refurbished; happy days once more. She had sent for me; I must hit upon a way to trap Knute Stackpool into confessing.

I said: "But Cousin Hester—if Max were innocent, why did he run away?"

"He was nervous," she replied. "All nerves. . . . And foolishly, too. The girl was as bad as he. Worse. She was trying to snare him—"

"What girl?"

She smiled, made an impatient gesture.

"Jennie Berryfield."

"Cecil's daughter?"

"Old Cecil's daughter, aye. A wild one. She told Max he would have to marry her. All nonsense. The girl was mistaken. . . . That's why Max ran away. Then when every paper in the land accused him of murder, he stayed away, naturally. But he'll be back."

I SIGHED. Riveted together and anchored in her mind were those twin ideas—to refurbish the hotel and thus bring Max back. Again I suggested:

"Why don't you come home with me, Cousin Hester? You said you have an enemy in this town—"

"An enemy—aye, an enemy. Perhaps it's Knute Stackpool. Perhaps Cecil Berryfield—though his daughter was not ruined. She married a farmer last year; and she's happy enough, so they say. But will I be afraid of an enemy, with Max by my side again?" And she laughed at the absurdity of the idea.

That night I found it difficult to go to sleep. The mattress was a thin thing and lumpy; the musty-smelling room was chilly; and for nearly two hours I lay wakeful, trying to sort out everything Hester had said. Was she mad? I doubted it. Was she half-mad? I doubted that, too. She was only blind and very old and very lonely.

And she loved her son, and her love had conjured up this elaborate alibi, which she whole-heartedly believed. Oh, I did not doubt that Knute Stackpool, with his lust for money, would have killed Jacob Wertleim if he had known who Wertleim was, and that he possessed twelve thousand dollars. But how could Stackpool have known?

SO I dismissed Stackpool from my suspicions. As I lay there in the dark with the chaotic winds of March loud in my ears, I was forced once again to an inevitable conclusion: my cousin Max had slain Jacob Wertleim.

A thorny thought, that was. Always he had been reckless and dashing and gay, but the blood of a man was the last thing I would have expected to find staining his hands. He must have committed the crime impulsively. I could imagine him wrought up by Jennie Berryfield's accusation, wanting to skip the country, but with no money. Then somehow he had learned of that twelve thousand dollars; it had spurred him into stabbing Wertleim and running away.

But how about those squeaking shoes that Hester had heard? They must have belonged to Wertleim. Wearing a pair in which Hester had never heard him walk, he had doubtless left the hotel for a midnight stroll to ponder his troubles, and upon his return, Max had killed him.

Well, that was that, and now I wanted sleep. But on this night sleep was no friend of mine. I turned and tossed and sighed, rising at last to light the lamp and to bring a flask from my grip. To my legs the liquor brought lethargy; but my mind was still alert as a sentry. The heap of cigarette-stubs mounted in the tray; the room became gray with smoke, and I slouched in a rocker, staring at the stained walls of this decaying hotel.

And suddenly I shivered. The chill room? Perhaps, but—it was something more. How can I explain? My inflamed imagination? The sound of the wind galloping through the streets of town? Yes, all of these. And more: a sense of something evil beneath this roof—some-

thing that slept in daylight but emerged to creep on mouse-feet in the deep night. Nonsense, nonsense! I must go to bed. Sleep. Tomorrow I would muster arguments to persuade Hester to desert this dilapidated building where murder had been done. To come home with me—

And then I heard it: A single cry. My name—in Hester's voice. It came from a distance—beyond my door and down the corridor and beyond her door.

Instantly I got up.

A matter of seconds, doubtless, my clawing myself erect. It seemed hours. It was a bad dream of futility. Once on my feet, I swayed horribly, but loud in my mind was the memory of her single cry—it had sounded like the squawk of an old hen on the slaughter-block. Through that smoke-gray room I plunged to my grip and dragged out my .38, and I pitched to the door. And the black damp of horror shrouded my mind. I had the dreamlike feeling of being too late, of bungling, of futility; a nightmarish sense that I represented all of humanity in these dark years—rushing fear-ridden toward some unimaginably black appointment with destiny.

Along the hall I plowed, my light carpet-slippers feeling heavy as stone boots fighting through mire. It was black, that hall—black, and filled with all the goblin memories of murder. My shoulder struck the jamb of her door, my palsied fingers grasped the knob and twisted it.

The door was locked.

"Cousin Hester!" I shouted. "Hester McCaw!"

She did not respond.

WITH my fist I beat the door, but the panels were stout wood. And all the time I called her name, but no reply could I hear.

Back to my room I plunged, grabbing up the lamp and carrying it precariously in both hands, setting it on the hall floor. Strength was rushing through my veins now. I lugged the rocking-chair into the hall; and stained on my mind forever will be the sharp shadow-pictures the low lamp projected on the walls and ceiling, of the chair and me.

Using it as a ram, I bashed the door. Again and again. A rocker broke off. Then the other. Still I battered. The right blow hit the door at last, and it leaped inward. I flung aside the chair, picked up the lamp—and its lemon-yellow rays fell on the corpse of Hester McCaw. On the floor she lay, dragged

violently from her vast bed, the bedclothing scattered like circus canvas hit by a tornado, her tongue choked out as if she were making a face at the world which had treated her so badly.

I PUT the lamp on the table and very calmly walked to the window. It was open. Outside was the roof of the veranda. I remembered how latticework adorned that veranda. Some one had climbed the lattice, to choke Hester McCaw in her bed. I emerged to the veranda roof, the cold wind flapping my pajamas, and cupping my hands about my mouth, I began bawling the name of Cecil Berryfield, night watchman in Turnford.

Well, it was not a dream, of course; but dreamlike indeed is the memory of the events which filled the remainder of that night. At last my voice reached Cecil Berryfield, who came trotting downstreet with his flashlight beam dancing on the windy ground; he shot its strong rays upward into my eyes and demanded to know why I was disturbing the peace. And my down-floating words seemed to penetrate his understanding with difficulty, he waited so long before replying. Then, obscurely angry, he declared:

"You've been drinking. You're drunk."

"I've had a nip, but I'm far from drunk," I replied; "and if you'll climb this lattice, I'll show you her body."

"You're drunk, or you wouldn't expect an old man like me to climb no lattice," he snapped. "Come down and open the door."

Maybe I was a little tight, for I reentered Hester's room with no revulsion, as if a kindly curtain—alcoholic and translucent—were stretched between me and reality. I even paused for an instant, staring down at her, and I murmured:

"You were brave. You knew you had an enemy—"

Then I stepped into the hall, groping my way through the strange darkness and down the stair; and when I opened the door, the wind was a lean hound leaping into the lobby ahead of Cecil Berryfield.

"You smell like a saloon," he told me. "Aint you ashamed to be drunk, and your cousin dead?"

"She wouldn't have minded."

"You're a strange, wild crew—you McCaws and you Mahoneys," he muttered.

"Aye," I murmured, the brogue thickening on my tongue. "The Irish are always strange—wonderful and strange."

Wordlessly he entered Hester's room, staring down at her for what seemed an hour; and in the lamplight his short mustache looked frosty as an October morning. I told him how she had called my name, and how I had come too late to her succor; and suddenly he swung his face close to mine and snapped:

"You sure you didn't do it?"

"Of course not," I said. "You're an old fool, and if you'll take off your badge and come outside, I'll pound some sense into your head."

His mouth curled; he sniffed insultingly. "Windbags. Always you've all been windbags."

He pivoted, slowly circling the room; and suddenly an exclamation rustled his mustache, and he stooped, plucking from the floor what looked like a golden marble. In a nasty-nice voice he said:

"My apologies. You aint the one."

I moved toward him. "What—"

He jerked that golden marble beyond my grasp, holding it aloft where I could see.

"Not you. Your cousin." —Only he called my cousin Max some shamefully profane names. "He's come back. . . . And this time we'll—get him. And I'll have a ticket to the execution—and my daughter, if she wants one."

Suddenly I comprehended. That golden marble was a miniature basketball; in high school Max had won such a trophy and he had always afterward carried it for good luck.

Close to his eyes Cecil Berryfield brought it. And he read, joyously, the tiny words engraved upon it: "*Max McCaw. Guard. 1919.*" His smile broadened. How he must have hated Max! He said: "Even before I call the coroner, I'll call the State cops. He's here. Back again. And he won't get away this time."

ALL the rest of that night and all the next day the name of Max McCaw unraveled from the teletypes; and newspapers everywhere carried the yarn of how after six years, the slayer of Jacob Wertleim had struck again, this time at his own mother. And why? To that query only one answer was possible: madness. Six years of shadowy flight had turned his brain. And in the mad month of March he had returned to Turnford in the dead of night, and now he was fleeing again.

Well, I didn't believe it. Knowing Max as I did, it was possible to imagine him in a jam with Cecil Berryfield's



I said: "You killed Jacob Wertleim...and then Hester." "Will people believe that?" he asked.

daughter, even slaying Jacob Wertleim for his money; but that he should sneak back and choke his mother was completely absurd. And just as absurd was the theory that he had done this in madness. Madcap he might be, but *mad*, never! No; under a different name he was likely ten thousand miles away, on the other side of the earth, fighting in China, maybe, or beachcombing in the Solomons.

That golden basketball which Berryfield had found was enough to convince most people that Max had returned to Turnford; but to me it seemed a rather obvious attempt to put the blame on his shoulders. Years before, Max must have lost it, and some one had found it and kept it to use now.

It was lucky for me, however, that the basketball had been dropped: all suspicion was on my cousin, none on me. And I might well have been suspected, otherwise. After all, Hester and I were in the Tavern alone: Berryfield could have pointed out that he found me drunk, that I had battered in the door of Hester's room. As it was, the Sheriff and

his deputies and the State agents merely questioned me as to what I had heard, and concentrated all their energies on spreading a dragnet for Max.

One fact I held back: that Hester had complained of an enemy in Turnford. How wise she had been to hearken to her woman's intuition! And how foolish—and how brave—to remain in town against the warnings which that intuition had whispered to her!

BY midmorning, black coffee had driven the sleepiness from my head, and I took a brisk walk in the crisp breeze. Again and again I asked myself what motive anybody could have had in killing Hester McCaw. She was so ancient and weak and harmless. Yet a motive there must have been, unless I was willing to accept the theory of Max gone mad, and I wasn't. No; some one in this village had been sufficiently steamed up about something to kill her. That person would have known which hotel room she occupied—in a small town such details of one's life are common property; and with the lattice on the veranda and Hester's window likely open for fresh air, that person had found circumstances favor-

able. To implicate Max, the basketball had been dropped; and if a secondary suspect was needed, my presence in the hotel would furnish it. Very neat!

Reaching the edge of town, I found myself approaching Knute Stackpool's miserable little house, and I decided to have a chat with that notorious tightwad. When I rapped on the kitchen door, no reply came. Turning the knob, I found it unlocked. In Turnford, people seldom locked their doors, even at night; I remembered how as a boy, visiting Cousin Hester from my city home, I thought that by leaving the doors and windows of the Tavern unlatched, she was inviting robbery and murder.

AT the edge of Stackpool's porch I shouted his name toward the out-buildings, but he was gone from the premises, and so I entered the kitchen. It was clean as a ship's galley—soap and water aren't expensive. I passed on into the combination living-room and bedroom, a bit uneasy, for if he discovered me here, he would surely think I was searching for his hidden cash. But other treasure concerned me—his wardrobe.

It occupied a shallow closet, an amazingly meager assortment of clothing and footgear. Instantly I spied the oxfords which he had worn the night before; and although they were not new, their tan stylishness, by contrast with his other shoes, looked as swankily out of place as an opera hat among hoboos. I picked up one and examined it; the size notation was missing, but it appeared smaller than either the leather boots or the dilapidated work-shoes which stood on the floor. For some odd reason, Stackpool must have purchased smaller shoes to wear on Sundays.

I glanced over his clothing: the dark-gray suit he had worn with the oxfords, the denim overalls, several pairs of frayed trousers, and an astonishing coat. Astonishing, that is, for Stackpool's wardrobe. It was gray-and-black hound's-tooth check, well cut; although it was so old that the elbows had worn thin, a faint odor still emanated from the material which proclaimed it Harris tweed. I carried it to the window and peered at the lining of the inside pocket to discover where he had bought it. What I saw there, in addition to the tailor's tag, and the badge announcing that it was genuine Harris tweed, surprised me so much I nearly dropped the coat. Hastily I replaced it and left Stackpool's house,

excitement mounting within me, and the assurance that I had stumbled onto the cold trail leading to the murderer of Jacob Wertleim and Hester McCaw.

Back to town I hurried, going directly to the office of the Turnford Weekly *Times*. This was Thursday, press day; and Editor Russell was remaking Page One with headlines about the murder.

"Charles Mahoney!" he exclaimed when I entered the office. "I've been looking for you. I'd like your version—"

Being a newspaper man, I went to his rattletrap typewriter and batted out an interview with myself, writing my impression of the crime. But I was very careful to cast suspicion on nobody. And I ended the interview with these words:

"Mr. Mahoney stated to the *Times* that he is convinced that Turnford has a fine future as a resort town. In accordance with Mrs. McCaw's wishes, he intends to remodel the Tavern in the near future. He will leave for his home after the services on Thursday afternoon, but he will return this week-end to make arrangements for the remodeling."

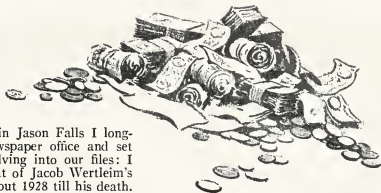
When I gave the editor the typewritten sheets, I asked if I might glance through his files of the *Times*.

"Help yourself," he told me, pointing to shelves where the bound volumes reposed.

I found the issues for 1931 and 1932, and began to read.

THAT evening I dined in Jason Falls, a town thirty miles from Turnford, and where I was unknown. Over my food, I read the Turnford Weekly *Times*, its front page blackened by news of the murder, the interview which I had written prominently displayed. Several times I read the final sentence of that interview, and I hoped that the murderer of Hester McCaw would read it too. I had no intention, certainly, of remodeling the Tavern and operating it, but I desired Turnford to believe that I had.

Late that afternoon before departing from Turnford I had told everyone who would listen about my great plans for the Tavern, how before the summer's end I expected the village to recapture its lost renown as a resort. So egocentric is a village, that nobody considered my predictions absurd. Then, with a great fanfare of promises to return at the week-end, to arrange for the work to begin, I had left; but secretly I intended to return this very night.



Upon arriving in Jason Falls I long-distanced my newspaper office and set them to work delving into our files: I wanted an account of Jacob Wertleim's activities from about 1928 till his death. Within the hour, my news editor called me back at the Jason Falls central office, and I did seven dollars' worth of listening.

In those glorious years while he was riding the financial merry-go-round, Jacob Wertleim was a much-interviewed, often-photographed money wizard; good advice on how to become rich exuded from him in many a bland miasma. Thrice he had spoken at conventions within our State, always the featured guest. Once he had delivered an address to the State bankers' association (could Conrad and Paul Festner have attended?) once to the State convention of sheriffs and peace officers (did Cecil Berryfield hear him there?) and once to a fraternal organization of which Knute Stackpool was a member.

If any of these men had seen him on the speaker's platform, they would of course have recognized him when he slipped into Turnford incognito, and they would have been reasonably certain that he was carrying a good deal of coin with him. On the other hand, Max McCaw was sharp-eyed and shrewd; he might have recognized Wertleim from his many photographs—and examined his luggage, finding money.

The Turnford Weekly *Times* had dug up an old cut of Max, a photo taken during his last year of high school, when he was a basketball star; and as I smoked my after-dinner cigarette, I stared at it. How handsome he was! Smoothly his dark hair swept back from his fine forehead; his eyes were dark and languishing; but his mouth and chin whispered of self-indulgence, of weakness. The face of a killer? Perhaps. The face of a hot-headed, impulsive young man, surely.

Murderer or not, I was fond of him still. He had charm, Max McCaw; and in his company you felt the world was a color-drenched, adventurous place. Looking at his picture, I remembered how suddenly his mouth would part in a sunny smile—a smile utterly boyish and

made gamin by the absence of two front teeth he had lost in some fist-fight. His smile could win you into emptying your purse into his palms. And yet he was wild. . . .

Leaving the café, I drove away from Jason Falls, but instead of going directly to Turnford, I routed my car to the county seat, and entered the smelly corridors of the courthouse. A sleepy deputy told me that Sheriff Bert Hudson was at home eating, so I drove to his house. He answered my knock himself, and at once remembered me from that morning when he had questioned me.

In his living-room I asked: "Any luck in finding Max McCaw?"

He shook his head.

"He didn't kill Hester," I said.

The Sheriff shrugged. "You're his cousin. You wouldn't think he did."

I said: "But I've a pretty good idea who did do it."

He stared at me, waiting.

"There's no proof," I admitted. "But I've baited a trap."

"What are you driving at?"

I told him, speaking low, as if there were ears at every window-sill. His lips pursed; his brow furrowed; he listened intently; and when I had unburdened myself, he stood up and said quietly:

"There's a chance you're right. I'll go with you."

WE went in my car. Low in the west, a thin slice of moon peered at us from among tatterdemalion clouds that hobbled across the sky like a mob of ragamuffins. I had some bad moments, driving along those country roads; perhaps my reasoning had been screwy, and we were off on a mad snark-hunt. I said as much to the Sheriff, but he only shrugged and muttered:

"I've been on wild-geese chases before."

The moon was vanishing as we came over the ridges and sighted the lights of Turnford in the valley far away. They

looked like the sparks of a campfire scattered on black ground. For a quarter of a mile I followed the downward road, then turned into a rutty lane and switched off the motor.

From the car pocket I took my flashlight, and from my grip the .38. Then, cutting through wooded hillsides and meadows and fields, we set out for the village. Success would be possible only if our presence were unknown. Silent as thieves, seeking always the shadows, avoiding farmhouses with their barking dogs, we reached the outskirts of Turnford just as the town clock was sending eleven bronze *bongs* into the windy night.

FROM my boyhood I recalled the layout of every alley in town; with the Sheriff at my heels, I led the way along those black arteries, toward the Tavern. March was at it again, living up to its windy reputation. High overhead, clouds could be dimly seen, scudding across the cold stars; and the village was like a dead place.

We approached the Tavern from the rear; and before venturing through its back yard, we halted. How ramshackle it looked, how derelict! Could anybody, I wondered, really believe that I intended to remodel this old wreck? I shivered suddenly; the wind was raw; or perhaps not the wind was responsible, but the strong current of evil that seemed to flow darkly from that building. Something sinister cursed that place—something hidden from the candid day, and known only to the mice romping gleefully in the decaying walls.

The Sheriff muttered: "I've just now thought of something."

I waited.

"Maybe," he said slowly, "Max McCaw never left. Maybe he's been hiding here—all these years. In the basement or the attic."

"No," I said, "that would be impossible. Hester would have known." But nevertheless his words brought to my mind a horrible vision of such a possibility: Max with his hair grown long and tangled, peering with crazed eyes through the dust-stained windows, watching the years roll by. No—no; but an odd pain pressed behind my dry eyeballs, and my teeth began to chatter. I clenched them and groped toward the kitchen door.

I had left it unlocked that afternoon; and as we stepped inside, I scoured the room for an instant with my flashlight. Since last night nothing had changed,

and in imagination I saw Cousin Hester bending over the great cook-stove, or sitting at the table, building great plans for a future that she was destined never to know. I strode to a tall door opening on a flight of basement steps; thick cobwebs obstructed the passage; I closed the door and led the Sheriff into the vast dining-room. My flashlight was dark now, but from some distant street-lamp enough faint light leaked through the lobby windows so that it was just possible to avoid bumping into furniture. In the blackest corner we eased ourselves onto a leather davenport and began our vigil.

And oh, the bleakness, the doubts that assailed me! Have you ever spent the sterile hours of night in an abandoned hostelry? My nervous system was strung tight as a violin string, and with every cell I listened. And what sounds! Always the loquacious wind gossiped in the eaves, and the very bones of the building were uneasy; and sometimes on the bare floor we heard the delicate patter of a mouse.

Once from the sidewalk outside I heard the loud empty *clocking* of heels, and through the window I observed Cecil Berryfield pacing by, making his rounds; and every half-hour the vibrant boom of the town clock reminded us that the night was slipping fruitlessly past. I wondered how long the Sheriff's patience would last. One o'clock arrived, one-thirty; and the deepest and weariest period of night was upon us. In the shadows by my side the Sheriff grew more and more quiet; his breathing became regular; the man was dozing! What magnificent nerves, I thought; but presently his drowsiness engulfed me too, and my tension slackened; I don't believe I actually slept, but the wind's talking receded farther and farther away, to the horizon of my consciousness. Then something snapped me wide awake.

WHAT was it? A sound? I don't know. I know only that all sleepiness left me; my brain was as wide-awake as a city street at ten in the morning.

I listened. I heard nothing but the wind outside, and a mouse squeaking in the walls. Yet I felt that some subtle change had come over the Tavern, some infinitesimal but tremendously significant mutation. And I was calm.

Then from far away—from up the stairs and along a corridor—I heard a sound. A single clang, dull and muffled,

of metal striking wood. I nudged the dozing Sheriff; wakening, he muttered "Uh-hh?" and I said: "*Shh-hh.*"

Immediately he also sensed some change, for he drew his revolver.

The clang did not come again, and for what must have been a full minute, we heard no alien sound. Then, unmistakably, the movement of footsteps reached us. Footsteps in the upper corridor, footsteps descending.

DEEP in blackness the staircase led down into the far side of the lobby; try as I might, I could not discern even the vague outlines of the intruder. The footfalls left the stair and vanished into the dining-room, the kitchen; I heard a door opening, and thought I caught the sound of the basement steps, creaking.

The Sheriff drew a long breath.

I whispered: "He must have climbed the porch lattice and come through Hester's room. He knew the way—from last night."

I sensed, rather than saw, the Sheriff nodding. And he whispered: "How long?"

"Give him time. It'll take quite a while."

Those minutes were the worst—those waiting minutes. But tremendously necessary. After ten of them had ticked away, I said: "All right."

Without flashlight guidance, we crept toward the kitchen.

At first, as we entered that room, I distinguished no light; but as I silently approached the door to the cellar, which hung slightly ajar, and eased it open, I made out, at the bottom of the stair, a faint illumination. Its source I could not see.

I touched the Sheriff's shoulder and put my lips very close to his ear. So

softly that I could scarcely hear them, I formed the words: "Wait here."

Then, with the exquisite caution of a cat stepping among bric-à-brac, I descended to the cellar and the murderer of Hester McCaw.

It was a vast catacomb, that cellar, floored with dirt, festooned with cobwebs, neglected for years. The staircase slanted down into its central chamber; on either side, doors opened into two galleries, each as large as a ballroom. The stray light rays were filtering from the south room.

I seemed years and years reaching the bottom of the stair.

The door to the south room stood wide open. Near the far wall a flashlight lay in the dust, its flattened beam pouring over a man's legs. The legs were working. Digging. As I watched, the spade in the man's hands increased the size of the windrow of earth that rimmed the long hole.

To me, that scene had all the unspeakable horror of a midnight heath, and witches concocting a brew to wreck ships at sea and blight fair fields of grain. It was pure evil, gleaming with a kind of strange inverted beauty, like the red fires of hell reflected on the shining onyx surface of the river Styx. I wanted to shout and run; I wanted to cleanse myself. But I stood like a man carved from grave-stone granite, utterly fascinated by the bitter horror unfolding like the poisoned blossom of a wicked flower. My knees quivered beneath me, not from fear, for I was far past that, but from the deep terror of my knowledge of what must happen next.

And it did happen. I couldn't tear my eyes from it. I tried—uselessly. And I tried to speak, too, to call: "You needn't do that. The game is up, anyway. You can spare yourself and me



Something evil was beneath this roof—something that slept in daylight but emerged to creep on mouse-feet in the deep night.

the abomination of that!" But I was a man left tongueless by the evil that it was my bad luck to behold.

Near the grave on that dirt floor a big piece of canvas lay, the top of a camping tent. The man stopped digging, put down his spade, and very fastidiously smoothed out the wrinkles in that coarse shroud. Then he went to the grave and bent over.

His face came into the flashlight's bath, lit pitilessly by those rays. It was a countenance familiar and yet strange, for all the softness, the mask of unctuousness which Conrad Festner had presented to the world was gone. It was a mass of cruelty. The mouth was wolfish.

He did not recoil; calmly he dipped his big hands into the grave, grappled something and dragged into sight the cadaver of my cousin Max. It had been six years in the ground, and I shall not describe it. . . .

From the shadows I watched him fold the canvas over the body. He intended, I suppose, to drag it away somewhere to his car, and drive with it to the country and bury it in the woods.

Putting down the flashlight, he seized the spade and shoveled dirt into the hole. It was the spade which had clanged as he entered the second floor of the Tavern.

Training my revolver on his figure, I drew a long breath and barked:

"Festner!"

What nerves the man had! I expected him to jump like a gazelle. But not Conrad Festner. He simply stopped working. And glancing my way, he said in that mushy voice:

"Why, Charles! I thought you had gone home."

And in the rays of the flashlight upshooting from the floor, the benevolent mask instantly slipped into place over his visage.

SLOWLY I advanced into the room toward him. He was smiling a little.

"Are you alone?" he asked rather pleasantly.

I nodded.

"That's unfortunate," he said.

"Why unfortunate?"

He shrugged. "Because you won't risk shooting me."

"Won't I?"

"Of course not. People might draw the wrong conclusions."

He was a fox, certainly. He was implying that if I shot him, people might think that he had seen me sneaking into

the Tavern; that he had trailed me and discovered me digging up that body.

I said: "I hadn't thought of that."

His smile widened. "Of course you hadn't. You always were impulsive, Charles. Like your cousin."

WHAT an actor he was! How perfectly he played the rôle of benevolence! Despite all I had beheld, it was still difficult even for me to believe I had watched him dig up the man he had murdered. He simply radiated goodness.

I said: "You killed Jacob Wertleim. And then Max. And then Hester."

He smiled and sighed. What an actor! Playing the part of the man falsely accused—but a man so forgiving that he held no ill-feeling against his defamer.

"Will people believe that?" he asked.

I said: "In 1932 your bank was going. There was a run. You must have done enough crooked stuff so you couldn't afford to have your bank closed. The examiners would have found enough forgeries to send you up for life. Yes or no?"

In reply, he simply smiled.

"I read about it in an old copy of the *Times*," I went on. "One afternoon when closing time came there was a long line of people outside. Closing time saved you—that day. You were putting up a bluff of having plenty of cash on hand. The next day you somehow had more cash. You kept paying depositors off, and finally the word went round that your bank was O. K. So people put their money back. The *Times* told all about it. What the *Times* didn't see was the connection between Jacob Wertleim's death and your bank staying open."

And still he showered me with the benevolence of his smile.

I said: "You recognized the man who said he was John Miller. You knew he was Wertleim. He'd addressed a banking convention in 1931, and you attended that. I found the item about your going, in the *Times*."

"You must have figured that Wertleim had skipped New York. You figured he'd have cash on him. You came to the Tavern and choked him in his bed and found his money. Max heard the scuffle and came to Wertleim's suite. You probably cracked Max over the head and then choked him. You've got big hands, Festner—they look strong."

I simply couldn't shake that smile from his face. His was the air of good-natured amusement with which adults listen to the prattle of children.

"You went through Max's pockets. You found his basketball charm—and saved it. You figured you might need it some day. And you found his knife and stuck it into Wertleim's heart. And then you carried Max down here and buried him. People jumped to the obvious conclusion—that Max had killed Wertleim for his money and fled. They never suspected that the money you used next day to pay off depositors was Wertleim's."

He kept smiling with his mouth—inanely. But his eyes weren't smiling, now.

I said: "Hester McCaw heard you in the hall that night. Your shoes squeaked. You were wise enough never to wear those shoes again. You put them away in your closet. And then, recently, you gave them to Knute Stackpool. Stackpool's so tight, he'll take anything—"

Festner was shaking his head, and his smile now had a positively mocking quality.

"I didn't give them to Stackpool," he said.

"Oh, yes, you did. Those shoes—and some other old clothes. That old tweed coat. In Stackpool's house this morning I examined it. The tailor who made it sewed a badge inside the inner pocket. It gives the size, and it says, '*Made for Conrad Festner, Esq.*' You gave it to Stackpool."

"I'm a better bargainer than that," he smiled. "I traded those clothes to Stackpool in exchange for some yard work he did for me this spring."

THAT was virtually a confession, and I told him as much. He shrugged—and smiled! And smoothly he said:

"What if it is? You won't pass the word on, I'm sure."

I knew, then, he intended to kill me.

I said: "You let Hester live. She was blind, and you knew she'd never discover this grave. And nobody else ever came here. Then she got the idea of remodeling the Tavern. You refused to lend her the money for that. She insisted on doing it, anyway. And you began to realize you'd have to kill her too. For if this room were remodeled, workmen would dig up Max's body. And people would know then that he didn't kill Wertleim and they'd wonder who did kill him—and who killed Max."

"Hester was blind—but she was sharp. And her blindness had developed her

woman's intuitiveness to a high degree. She felt your intentions, Festner. She knew she was going to be killed. But she didn't know who was going to do it.

"When I said last night that I'd lend her the money to remodel the Tavern, you knew you'd have to kill her. You did it while I was sleeping here. You thought I'd be blamed—or Max. . . . And then today when you read in the *Times* that I'd left town, but that I was coming back to remodel the Tavern, you were desperate. So desperate you sneaked in here to dig up this body. I was beyond your reach—you couldn't kill me and stop the remodeling plans—so you came for the body—"

IT'S little known, but nevertheless true, that elephants can move faster than almost any other animal. And Festner, built on pachyderm lines, acted so quickly, took me so unawares, that I had no time to fire.

He said, still smiling: "But you're not beyond my reach *now*."

And the next instant I yelped with pain as the spade-handle cracked the wrist of my gun-hand. The gun flew from my grasp. And around my throat, the thumbs closing my windpipe, were his big hands—how he got them there so rapidly, I'll never know.

For a moment I felt the choking panic that Jacob Wertleim and Max McCaw and Hester had experienced before me. But I had been a police reporter, and a detective once had showed me how to break that hold.

Up between his outstretched arms my own arms soared, knocking them apart. And at the same instant I lunged against him, sending him sprawling backward.

Down to the dirt floor he fell, his countenance bearing such astonishment that for a second his smile vanished. Then it returned. And I saw why. He was snatching up my fallen gun.

But before he could pull the trigger, a shot came from the door. Then another. Conrad Festner tumbled backwards. The Sheriff was an expert marksman, and Conrad Festner moved no more.

But when I snapped my flashlight onto his upturned face, I was greeted by that smile which he had carried with him even into death, and which, I fancied, he would need in that Court of Justice over on the other side.

"Bank Night Is Murder Night," another ably written detective story by Thomas Duncan, will appear in an early issue.

This second of Gordon Keyne's series about the old-time Regular Army centers around an officer who tried in vain to leave his past behind him in hard service west of Laramie.



THE post sutler's Fort Fetterman store was popular on this March afternoon, following the drill recall. Blue blouses were thick. The air was hazy with the smoke of pipes and cigars. The paymaster's ambulance had just come the hundred miles from Laramie, and soldier money cluttered soldier pockets.

Teamster Hollis, fingering his glass at the end of the pine bar, eyed the throng with idle, sardonic gaze. On this side of the store were counter and creature comforts for enlisted men and civilians. The same for shoulder-straps were yonder across the broad white line painted on the floor. A far cry from the Officers' Club of Governor's Island, reflected the man called Hollis—and for him, the farther the better.

He was trimmer in build and bone than most of those around him. Cowhide boots, jeans or buckskins, flannel shirts of all hues; post teamsters, woodcutters, a few bullwhackers laid over between freighting trips. The Bozeman trail, through the raw Wyoming territory to the Montana gold-fields, was at the moment empty.

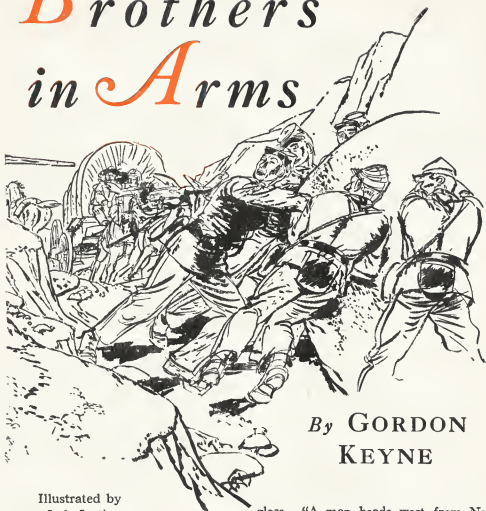
"I hear tell," said the man next Hollis, "they aint no pilgrims on the way yet."

"Aye," said another. "Gold-seekers all waiting at Laramie, waitin' to hear if the Sioux are on the warpath or not."

Hollis glanced at the two, contemptuous of their oaths and foul jests, and looked at the opposite throngs along the officers' bar. His gaze rested for one incredulous moment, then became alert and startled.

He did not know all the five hundred men at the post, but by sight at least he knew the score of officers. Here was a

Brothers in Arms



By GORDON
KEYNE

Illustrated by
Lyle Justis

new one, to judge by the introductions, the formal salutes and hearty handshakes. . . . Captain's bars on his shoulder-straps—a guest, or assigned to the post?

It really did not matter, to a teamster. But when the new officer half turned to sweep the room with casual blue eyes, revealing his profile and closely trimmed blond beard, Hollis caught breath on a "Damn!" and twisted abruptly around to cover up. . . . Captain Steve Brace!

When Hollis shot another look from under his slouch brim, he drew a breath of relief. Brace was chatting at ease, with no interest in what lay beyond the chalk-line. Not that he would have recognized a beard-blurred face amid the faces of other teamsters anyway.

"Yet it's a small world," reflected Hollis resentfully, brooding over his refilled

glass. "A man heads west from New York, leaves his past at the Missouri, and stakes out at Fetterman—the last sanctuary under the flag, except Smith and Reno. Serves as teamster, subject to some quartermaster sergeant. And here comes a pair of shoulder-straps to bridge the spaces, rouse memory, waken curses. Brothers in arms, eh? Brothers be damned, I say!"

He felt a surge of bitterness. All the frontier was of course in a state of flux; and after the abandonment of Kearny, the bloody fort where men white and red had died, the Sioux had quieted. Hollis had thought Fetterman, with its detachments of the 4th and 18th Infantry, the safest bet for his purpose of new name, new life. Yet here had showed up Captain Steve Brace, of all men! It was fate, and fate was hard.

Hollis eyed the figure again, and took heart. Above the visor of his forage cap



"Friend, we need a man or two more. Join up with us for the gold-fields. Kiss Uncle Sam good-by!"

was the number of the 6th; evidently, then, Brace was just a transient.

A sudden stir occurred at the doorway. A dozen newcomers shouldered in, civilians in felt and flannels, greasy leather and noisy cowhide; gold-seekers bound for Montana, by their belted guns. Defiant voices rose high:

"Can't drink? Who in hell says so?"

"Post regulations; general orders are tacked up outside—"

"To hell with general orders! We aint sojers; we're free American citizens, and our money's as good as yours!"

"You're on a military reservation. Get back across that chalk-line and stay there!"

"Oh, I don't know! We're quite a crowd, and we elect to drink where we like."

"Call the guard!"

THE noise quieted. The party of gold-seekers chose discretion; their leader, a tall sorrel-bearded, swaggering fellow, saw reason. He came over to the bar beside Hollis and nodded amiably.

"Friend, we need a man or two more! Join up with us for the gold-fields. Throw in with us, and you'll make your pile—if you know the country in these parts. Do you?"

"Tolerably," said Hollis. "Teamsters should."

"Aye; drink with us, kiss Uncle Sam good-by, and we'll march in an hour!"

"No." Hollis laughed. "Thanks very much, but I'm sticking here."

"Aw, leave him alone, Red!" said another with resentment. "We don't want no eddicated gentry along of us."

Red Peters, the sorrel announced himself, and better than any gentleman in the country, teamster or officer. Hollis cursed himself for having neglected his rôle; he was saved from any trouble, however, by a tap on the arm, and turned to see a sergeant of the post quartermaster department.

"I've been looking for you, Hollis. The quartermaster wants to see you in his office *pronto*. Immediately."

"Special, is it?"

"I guess so. You're elected to drive the paymaster ambulance to Fort Reno."

"Where's the driver who came from Laramie?"

The sergeant grinned and hooked a thumb toward the gold-seekers.

"Lit out; took to the brush on French leave for the mines. No trace of the so-and-so. Finish your drink and report."

Hollis stepped out of the store into the fresh, cool air of afternoon. He wondered idly why Red Peters and his outfit wanted a man who knew the country, when there was only the one trail to follow. . . .

The low sun flooded the valley of the Platte, and the adobe and log buildings of the post, on the flat hill above the river, with pale yellow light. The snow-flecked ridges were bright. The Laramie range in the southward shone whitely.

Pacing along the parade to the quartermaster's office, he entered to a jerk of the head from the orderly outside the door. Before the captain quartermaster seated at the table inside, he stood at instinctive attention, and checked an instinctive salute. Teamsters were not required to salute officers.

The captain, leaning back, must have sensed something of the instinct, for he eyed Hollis with speculation.

"Hollis? Yes; you're recommended to me as the best man with teams at the post. Can you handle an ambulance and four mules?"

"Yes sir."

"Gad, man! You've the carriage of a soldier. Ever served?"

"I'd rather not answer that, sir."

"Very well. You're to drive the paymaster ambulance to Reno tomorrow; if you're not relieved by some one there, keep on with it. You will report yourself to the quartermaster at Reno; he'll furnish you transportation back here, if you're no longer required as driver.

"Major Becker, paymaster from Laramie, is here in the post hospital, sick. His rascal of an enlisted-man driver has apparently deserted. Captain Brace, who came in the ambulance from Laramie on special duty by department orders, will act as paymaster and go on with the funds."



Hollis stiffened. "Captain Brace?" he echoed dully.

"Yes—on the General Staff at Omaha. You'll report to him, with the ambulance, ten o'clock tomorrow morning, at the commanding officer's headquarters. See that you have sufficient forage for the mules. That's all."

Hollis walked out in a daze. To Reno, upward of sixty miles, with Steve Brace sitting beside him! And there was no way out of it.

Long after Taps sounded, he lay awake in his bunk, still dazed, incredulous. Upon the dark, in lines of fire, were traced the court-martial proceedings at Fort Columbus, Governor's Island. The fourth day of January, 1868. Lieutenant James C. Brace, 6th U.S. Infantry, dismissed from service—"that Lieutenant James C. Brace, whilst conveying Government funds in the city of New York, did fail to deliver said funds." Letters of fire. The damning testimony; and he with his mouth shut, unable to refute the lies, unless he chose to cast the blame where it belonged, on Steve Brace.

STEVE, a captain now; and he, a teamster, serving afar under a borrowed name. Serving, waiting; a hard man to down, beginning anew and in silence, here where chances were many and a man could rise afresh. The limbo of



Fort Fetterman, where the army calls sounded under the rippling flag, where men in blue weathered the day's duty, was merely a station in purgatory. Tossing here tonight in the grips of justice and injustice, he wondered why the horizon had closed down upon him by sending this other man out of the past into his present. And upon a deadly parallel, of funds to be conveyed.

BREAKFAST over, next morning, he inspected the ambulance and the mules, drew the forage for the animals, and prepared his personal outfit. He harnessed up, and on the hour tooled around to headquarters with grim expectancy; it was denied. Captain Brace gave his bearded driver a look, a nod, and no second glance.

The headquarters orderly clattered down the porch steps with the paymaster's stout little chest, and chucked it under the seat. The Captain climbed to the seat and stowed his overcoat beside him. The escort of four infantrymen clambered in by the rear and sat two on a side, Springfields between their knees. Two mounted infantrymen, sergeant and private, trotted their horses to the fore as an advance.

"Very well. Let's go," directed the Captain, with salute and wave of the hand to the C. O. and his lady.

Hollis kicked off the brakes, clucked to the mules and straightened his lash over the lead team. They were away for Fort Reno upon the Powder River in the shadow of the Pumpkin Buttes.

Crossing the river by the flatboat ferry, they went rattling and jingling by

the wash-cut road up to the crest of the valley, and headed into the Bozeman Trail for the north. The two mounted men, slung Springfields over shoulder, hung to the reins at a hard trot. The four men in the ambulance swapped soldier wit. Hollis said nothing. The man beside him spoke suddenly:

"A rough party in the sutler's store yesterday. I hear they were finally ejected from the post grounds and have pulled out from their camp. They don't seem afraid of the Sioux."

"They're not," grunted Hollis.

"We'll overtake them?"

"No. They're off ahead of us; they travel light. This ambulance is a heavy haul for the mules," Hollis rejoined.

Brace twisted around and looked at him.

"We have ten thousand in specie under this seat. The Sioux have no use for that, but might fancy the mules or our scalps. I—I dare say—"

The words died away as though strangled. Hollis gave the officer a sidelong glance, surprised the horrified recognition in his eyes, and smiled grimly; then he gave attention to the road again.

A bleak landscape, what could be seen from the dips and gullied curves. The road was lonesome at this time of year, and rough at all times. The ambulance plunged into dry washes and pebbled stream-beds, skirted alkali basins, labored over the rises, or at safe distance lurched around shoulder-ledges or bouldered outcrops.

The mounted men ahead, their rifles unslung, held the lead by an interval that varied with the pace of the mules. The



four men in the ambulance had run out of small-talk, and only vented comment, of a kind, when pitched back and forth on their hard seats under the roll-up side curtains. Captain Brace, anchored with feet and hands against the lurches, presently spoke under his breath.

"You, Jim! Never had a word from you. I—I suppose you hate me?"

Hollis gave him a hard, contemptuous look, briefly.

"No. You're beneath it."

"My God, Jim! When I think of what you did for me—"

"Save your breath," snapped Hollis.

The words had fearful impact, for the two men were half-brothers. . . .

Laramie Peak, to the south of Fetterman, was gradually sinking in the rear, when Hollis drew rein, to ease the mules. The sergeant and private in the advance stiffly dismounted, inspected their horses, and idled within the limits of the reins. The four men tumbled out to straighten their kinked muscles. Captain Brace, pipe in mouth, alighted, and Hollis followed him, strolling a little apart.

"A word with you, Steve," Hollis jerked out. He caught a half-fearful look and stared it down with hard level eyes. "None of your cant or sentiment. I didn't shoulder your blame for *your* blasted sake, and you damned well know it. I was alone in the world; you had a wife and kid. That's all."

The face of the officer was sulky, sullen, touched with panic.

"I know it, Jim. She—she's left me. Gone back to her folks. She always did love you; she said so, finally."

Hollis spat an oath. "And the child?" "Dead. Pneumonia. . . . I tell you, she always loved you!"

Hollis looked into his face for a moment. Then:

"You lie, Steve. She married you. She probably discovered her mistake, that's all. Time's up. Let's be going."

"Wait!" bleated Steve Brace. "Jim! What can I do—"

"Do nothing," snapped Hollis. "You're good at that. I'm fighting my own way, and satisfied. And keep your trap shut. I don't want it known that I was once an army officer who got dismissed for losing funds entrusted to him."

"Hold on!" exclaimed the other desperately. "You don't know—"

"Shut up and climb in," said Hollis.

They went on, beneath the westering sun, and came presently to the bad-lands.

Here, in the twisting passes that constantly opened and closed, the mounted men ahead were frequently out of sight. The ambulance, rattling and bouncing, made a great noise. Here all was desolation; fissured slopes always flanking the way, sand hills and crooked shouldered knolls, the northern horizon rock-bound and bristling.

IN a straightaway between shelving slopes, the sergeant came trotting back with hand lifted. Hollis drew rein.

"What d'you want?" demanded the Captain.

"There's a boulder lodged in the road just around this next curve, sir."

"Get it out of the road, then."

"It's too big for us to handle, sir."

"All right. Drive ahead, Hollis, and we'll have a look."

Hollis followed on behind the sergeant, and as the snaky pass opened, braked to a stop. The pass was hedged by bouldered slopes. A huge rock was lodged in the road, as though toppled from one of the benches on either side;



but it could be rolled into a wash gully on the right.

Hollis restrained the mules, restive by thirst and halt. The soldiers in the ambulance craned to see; the Captain swore softly and voiced testy orders.

"Tumble out, you men! Damn it, don't sit around and gawk! All six of you get to work at that rock, roll it aside!"

The four clumped to the ground and ambled forward. Sergeant and private dismounted, leaned their guns aside, and the six got tentative grip on the boulder.

And at this instant it happened:

The bursting crack of gunfire, ping and thud of bullets, triumphant shouts, men with covering rifles to right and left. The two horses turned and bolted full speed. The lead mules were down and kicking. The wheelers were rearing and kicking in a tangle of harness.

"Don't a one of you move!" shouted a commanding figure, sorrel of hair and beard. "Got you covered! Keep your hands free and put 'em up!"

Hollis, busy with the reins, knew better than to reach for his Spencer carbine. The four men had left their guns in the ambulance. The gaping, flushed faces of the six men were curious; they stood frozen to the boulder, arms extended, as four men slid down into the road. Two others remained, rifles ready, above.

The two leaning Springfields were broken on a rock. The four, rifles at

ready, closed in on the ambulance. Their sorrel leader grinned at Hollis, and mounted the hub of the off wheel.

"I'll just take them guns of yours," said he, and did so, relieving Hollis and the officer. He turned to his men. "Pack these long Toms and other hardware up the slope a mite."

The four Springfields, the Spencer, the officer's revolver, were tossed up the left-hand slope among the rocks.

"You'll get 'em later," said Red Peters. "Don't want to strip you, account the Injuns. Well, Mister Teamster, if you'd joined up with us, you'd be getting better'n sowbelly and beans for supper! So long. Cap, you and your blue-bellies will get drilled the first move. Stand quiet!"

So the raiders retreated, Red Peters hugging the paymaster's chest. A clatter of hoofs from the gully ahead. Silence invested the road, except when the two mules snorted, uneasy with the scent of blood from their dead comrades.

"Oh, my Lord!" groaned Captain Brace, and relaxed. "I sent the men forward, let them leave their guns—"

"Aye," said Hollis, and gave him a look. "You did. Who was that fellow above, in blue uniform trousers? The deserter driver?"

"Yes, blast him!" Captain Brace swore heartily, too heartily; his eyes flickered about.

Two of the men were climbing for the arms, and presently recovered them.

"Gross negligence of duty," observed Hollis softly. "Plenty of witnesses."

Captain Brace wiped sweat from his face. "Yes. Well, turn around and go back to Fetterman. We can't go on now;



it's the closest point to report. I'm in for it, and must take the blame."

"Wait a minute," said Hollis. "Steve, you and I must have a word. Get out."

"Eh? What do you mean?"

"Climb out."

Captain Brace wiped his brow again, and obeyed. Hollis joined him. Together they walked a little apart, then Hollis faced about.

"Eloise isn't here now, Steve," he said softly.

"What the devil are you driving at, Jim?" asked the other, frowning.

"If my testimony were given, the story of my record would come out. Accidentally, of course. But it might even be intimated that I'm the fellow who tipped off these gold-seekers, perhaps arranged the hold-up with that deserter of yours."

"Why, Jim, don't be absurd!" began Captain Brace.

The teamster cut him short.

"Once is enough, Steve. I know you. Damned anxious to turn back and take your medicine, aren't you? Cheap at the price, too. You fixed it neatly so not a man was hurt. I suppose you took five thousand, and left the rest for Red Peters, eh? Framed it all up with that deserter."

His soft, careful words sank deep. Captain Brace glared at him; the glare was less of anger than of terror.

"You devil!"

"Now, Steve, listen." Hollis took his arm. "These two mules we have left are like all the mules at Fetterman—they're broken to ride. Red Peters and his friends will halt, make camp, celebrate the haul and divide the plunder. They know we can't overhaul them with the ambulance and two mules; they think you'll turn around and make for Fetterman. But you won't. You and I will take those two mules and follow."

CAPTAIN BRACE uttered hoarse, futile sounds and wiped his face anew.

"Leave the men camped here, put yourself in my hands," said Hollis. "Do as I order you, implicitly. Those men will certainly stop at sunset. I'll guarantee, if you obey me, that we'll stop the mouth of that deserter and regain what you left of the money; what's missing will be laid to the bandits. There'll be no one to tell tales against you, except me; and you can be sure of my silence. Yes?"

The officer hesitated. "Damn it, Jim! I can't do that—"



"Then back to Fetterman, and I'll have charges preferred, and we'll open up the old affair, and—"

"Good God, no! I'll do it!" exclaimed the Captain, breaking.

He took command and played his part, briskly enough. The mules were bridled for riding, the two men mounted, took Spencer and Springfield.

"Sergeant, stay here with the men; remember, you're guarding Government property. Get that boulder out of the way. Ready, Hollis? Let's go."

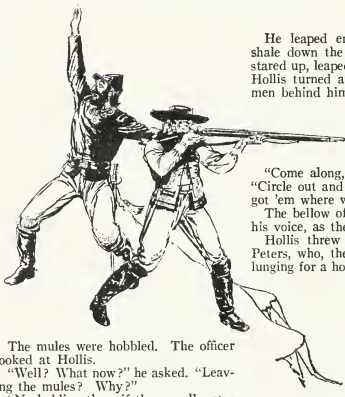
The men wished them Godspeed eagerly, wistfully, as they rode—looked after them admiringly. Proper officer, that Captain!

Along the clay-banked gully the trail showed plain; booted feet, hoof-marks—on out of the gully, into a wide broken waste-land of sandhills, rock outcrops, boulders, with many fissures of dry washes and view constantly shortened.

The mules stepped on at rapid walk; the two men kept silence. Hollis was alert, grim, uncompromising. Gradually the shadows lengthened, and all the terrain was drenched in yellow light. Sunset was close when they rounded the base of a huge sandy hummock, and Brace drew rein, eying the twisted wash ahead.

Beyond the base of the hill, by a quarter-mile, a thin spiral of smoke mushroomed at the top and drifted in the suck of a listless air along the wash.

"Leave the mules here and go ahead," said Hollis. "They're camped in a hollow—struck a seepage-hole of water, likely."



He leaped erect, sending a rifle of shale down the slope. The men below stared up, leaped to their feet, scattered. Hollis turned and waved, as though to men behind him.

"Come along, men!" lifted his shout. "Circle out and surround them! We've got 'em where we—"

The bellow of the Springfield checked his voice, as the officer fired.

Hollis threw up his Spencer at Red Peters, who, the chest in his arms, was lunging for a horse. The stubby carbine

The mules were hobbled. The officer looked at Hollis.

"Well? What now?" he asked. "Leaving the mules? Why?"

"No holding them if they smell water and stampede. This must be a surprise. Wait! Give me your cap and coat."

CAPTAIN BRACE, futile and sullen, obeyed. Hollis donned them, picked up his carbine, and led the way.

They trudged in the curve of the shallow, sandy draw flanked by rocks; the smell of wood-smoke became perceptible. Hollis turned aside and led to the left by a break in the slope. The stalk, at a crouch, took them shortly to the slender plume of smoke.

From the ragged rock rim of a little basin, lying belly-flat they peered down. Horses tethered, men grouped at ease near the small pool, Red Peters seated on the chest and fiddling with its seals and lock—all within seventy yards.

"When I get up and shout," breathed Hollis, "you shoot. Down that deserter with the blue pants; and shoot for your life, damn you! If he gets away, your goose is cooked. Get him with your first shot. Then shoot for Red Peters."

Face white and drawn under his blond beard, Captain Brace shoved forward his heavy Springfield.

"We can't kill all of them," he muttered.

"No need," said Hollis. "No need of killing any; they'll run like sheep. But we must kill to save your blasted hide. Ready?"

jumped. He threw the lever and pulled again. The breech-block of the Springfield single-shot clicked home upon another cartridge.

Red Peters was down, up again; the Springfield roared once more, and he was knocked over and stayed down. Another figure sprawled beside the fire—the deserter, with that first bullet through his head.

The smoke lifted and thinned away. In a wild clatter and scurry, the other men had mounted and gone with mad panic spurring them, thinking only of escape into the gathering twilight from the sudden Nemesis that had overtaken them. Captain Brace stood up, leaning on the rifle, staring down.

Red Peters lay near the fallen chest, the deserter by the fire and pool; abandoned packs, saddles, and weapons, lay strewn about. A single horse remained, untethered, but coming back to nuzzle his master wonderingly.

"A better man than you, that fellow Peters," said Hollis, a vicious bite in his words. "His horse loved him, anyhow; he was all bully and no sneak. Here, take your coat and cap."

He tossed them at Captain Brace, who caught and donned them hastily.

"What if—if the money's gone?" he exclaimed.

Hollis laughed curtly.

"No chance; Red Peters was too anxious to get away with the chest. Looks as if he'd broken the lock and was getting ready to haul out the plunder. If it's broken, then all's well and you're covered up. If not, we must break it."

He started down the slope. Captain Brace came after him. Below, they both halted, looking at the same thing. The paymaster's chest had come open in its fall, and tight packs of greenbacks were peeping out.

"Broken, all right," said Hollis.

"Look here, Jim, for God's sake!" exclaimed the officer. "Don't be so cursed bitter about everything! After all, we grew up together; we're brothers; we've stood together against the world—"

Hollis eyed him with sardonic gaze.

"Aye, but not against destiny, Steve. Each man fights his own battle there—that is, if he's man enough to fight at all. You're not."

"Damn you," burst out the other, "you needn't be so blasted scornful! I've done the right thing by you. The bank at home has a sealed letter from me, telling the truth about that other business in New York. If anything happens to me, you'll be cleared—"

Comprehension of his words caught him, shook him, silenced him. Hollis broke into a raucous laugh.

"And if I put a bullet into you, I'd be all cleared, eh?"

"Oh, come, Jim!" exclaimed Captain Brace uneasily. "I wasn't thinking any

I've had heavy poker losses, Jim. I had to raise the wind somehow. I owe everything to you—"

"You do not!" snapped Hollis violently. "Not one damned thing do you owe to me! Just one thing I want. I wish to hell I'd never see your blasted face again in my life! Now collar your paychest, and we'll get back to the mules. I can swear it had just so much money left in it when we recovered it. Better count it first—"

A SUDDEN rasping breath from one side, a scuffling sound, checked him and fetched him around.

Red Peters, whom he had supposed dead, had death in his face but not yet in his brain. The man was wavering on one elbow, gaspingly. In his free hand he was lifting a heavy revolver, lifting it weakly so it sagged back and forth, but lifting it doggedly. His eyes, above it, were biting and deadly as those of a dying rattler.

"Drop it, you fool!" barked Hollis, and jerked up his Spencer.

The revolver gushed smoke and flame. Into the gush, between those deadly eyes, Hollis fired pointblank. The sorrel face jerked and fell; the hand and weapon plunged limp into the dust.

"Lord! I never thought he'd have missed, this close!" Hollis lowered his carbine and peered curiously at the result of his shot. "Took a lot of killing, but—"

Red Peters was lifting a heavy revolver. "Drop it, you fool!" barked Hollis.



such thing, and you know it very well. Eloise made me draw up that confession. I told her the truth, you know. That's the real reason she left me, I guess. I'd had a drop too much, and she wormed it out of me."

Hollis spat, with a grimace.

"Steve, the more you talk, the more of a mongrel pup you show yourself!" he said acidly. "All I can say is, thank God we didn't have the same mother! And now you'll go back and be a regular billy-be-damned hero—recovered the paychest single-handed and so on. Instead of a court-martial, you'll probably get a medal."

"It's all your doing," said the officer miserably. "You were right about it;

A queer choking sound drew him. He turned, to see Captain Brace clutching at the air and uttering strangled, gasping words:

"I guess—I guess you got your wish, Jim—"

Red Peters had not, after all, missed his last shot.

Another of Gordon Keyne's vivid and authentic stories of the old Regular Army will appear in an early issue.

A Million for

He's undertaken to make a million dollars in one year through the success-formula of Personal Mystery. This sixth month of his ultra-bold enterprise finds him behind schedule, but well on his way—and in trouble.



Illustrated by
Austin Briggs

The Story So Far:

BENTLEY DEWERT had found the going plenty tough ever since Hartswell, his city editor, fired him. And then, just when his landlady Miss Rylan was going to throw him out, he received a letter from Ephraim Brood, president of a well-known soap company, stating that Hartswell had recommended him for a job.

"I am a success," Brood confided to Dewert, "because I own the secret of success. If you've read 'The Count of Monte Cristo,' you've seen it work. Personal mystery made the sailor *Edmond Dantes* over into the magnificent *Monte Cristo*. Let people *imagine* things about him. Didn't talk about himself. Lawrence of Arabia was another: an able and daring officer, yes; but personal mystery made him a world figure."

"Very interesting, Mr. Brood. But—well, just how does it concern me?"

"Ever hear of a ghost-writer?" Brood demanded. "Well, you're going to be a ghost-actor. I'm going to write a book. Going to give my formula to the world. Need a stooge—somebody to *live* that book. While I write it! That's your job. Pay you money to be my stooge. You'll make a million dollars. How's that for a job? Want it?"

Dewert took the fantastic job. With the five hundred dollars capital Brood provided, he bought new clothes, put up at the fashionable Washington Towers—and bribed the clerk *not* to let another guest, a French airplane-buyer, know that he, John Destiny (that was the stage name he had chosen) was in residence. The hotel-clerk promptly tipped off the newspaper men—and before the dust settled, a certain airplane-manufacturer had paid Mr. Destiny six thousand dollars to keep away from the airplane-buyer.

Personal Mystery worked even in hard-boiled Wall Street too. As John Destiny, he set up an office near by; and seizing his opportunity, got himself so much talked about as a mysterious new operator (presumably a "front" for well-known and powerful interests), that the all-too-clever and none-too-scrupulous broker Ryster paid him ten thousand dollars for an option on his "holdings" of a certain stock—which in reality amounted to just one hundred shares. It is to be admitted, of course, that our hero had help in this deal from Pyramid Jo Caddis, another tough broker, who hated Ryster.

In another quarter, however, Dewert ran into trouble. One night he was greatly taken by a pretty girl dining with an old gentleman in the Towers restaurant, and was wondering what sort of personal mystery he could employ to make her acquaintance, when the old fellow choked on a fishbone and collapsed. Bentley took them to his rooms, called a doctor, and politely left them alone. When he returned, they had gone, leaving no message.

John J. Destiny

By FULTON
T. GRANT

The newspapers soon supplied the answer: Lorraine Graymaster had aided her wealthy aged uncle to escape from the asylum in which, she believed, he had been unjustly confined; and the two had disappeared.

They got in touch with Dewert again, however; and he learned that Graymaster's supposed insanity was based on his knowledge of a certain paralyzing light-ray which would be of the utmost value in war. Bentley was able to save Graymaster from a gang of foreign conspirators determined to get possession of the old man's secret, but was himself captured by them. . . . Personal Mystery—and plenty of nerve—worked again, however: Dewert came out of the fracas with a whole skin and a check for fifty thousand dollars; but he knew the excitement had just begun.

And now a not-so-crazy inventor mistook the *P(ersonal) M(ystery)* lettering on Dewert's office door to mean *Promotion Management*, and brought him a weird gadget designed to reduce the expense for fuel in power-production. Tough old Pyramid Jo Caddis took a hand in that deal—and when the cards were all played, an all-too-suspicious holding-company management had paid the inventor and his promotion associates half a million dollars to keep the already outmoded gadget from cutting into their business. (*The story continues in detail:*)

THIS was a new manner for Ephraim Brood. It puzzled Bentley, and made him feel somehow uncomfortable. Besides, it didn't sit well upon the habitually irascible little soap-manufacturer. Explosiveness was a natural part of his character; and once you got used to it, you made allowances for it—you expected it, and you didn't even mind it when he roared and bellowed and screamed at you. But this was different. This slow, half-sad, half-diffident manner of the man—sitting across his desk and leaning back into his chair with his chins buried



in his bosom as he peered under his brows at Bentley as though something were hurting him inside—this new Ephraim Brood was just a little surprising. And shocking too.

"So," he said at length. "You want to try it on your own, boy? Hm-m-m!"

"Well, sir—" Bentley began, but the little man was not listening.

"You've hit your stride now, hey? You feel your oats. You've got the hang of this Personal Mystery thing, eh? And you want to work out your own schemes—that right, boy?"

"Not exactly that, sir, but—"

"Got your hands on some money, now, eh? Splitting that five hundred thousand dollars with Caddis and Jaffley, you'll have about a quarter of a million. Hm-m-m-m. Not bad. Not bad at all. Hm-m-m."

"Well, it gives a fellow confidence, Mr. Brood; and I—"

"Confidence, eh? So it does, so it does. Hm-m-m."

"That's a lot of money, sir. It proves your formula, you see. A man can do a lot of things with two hundred and fifty thousand dollars, so of course I—"

Then the hurricane:

"Bah!" It was like an explosion. The pince-nez on Brood's nose was trembling and vibrating with sudden rage.

"Bah!" he roared. "Damned young idiot! Damned cocky young idiot! You go blundering along, hit or miss. You step into something and make a few pennies, half by luck. D'ye think *you* did it? No, you didn't. It was Caddis who made that money—Caddis, an old-timer, a Wall Street shark, a natural-born sharpshooter, that's who. *You* didn't play any Personal Mystery tricks: it was all Caddis. Using this poor little inventor for ammunition. Using you for a sucker. Made you put up the money, didn't he? Didn't notice him laying any cash out, did you? No, you didn't. And then what? Then, when your little friend Jaffley, who is so dumb and so naïve nobody could believe it, deludes himself into thinking he's got something and works Amalgamated for half a million, you take your share of it and come here and tell me *you* made some money. Tell me *you* want to handle this thing now. You want to use your imagination; you want to invent your own situations. Bah! Yah, yah, yah! Bah! Damned young fool!"

BENTLEY could resent that. "You're pretty hard to please, Mr. Brood," he broke in. "After all, you hired me to do a job, and I'm doing it. I've got a quarter of that million, which is practically living up to my—"

"No, you haven't," snapped Brood. "If you were living up to schedule at \$2,600 a day, you'd have \$229,000 for the ninety-three days you've been working. You talk about a quarter million, but you haven't got it. Take out the fifty thousand in stock that you were fool enough to leave in that company, and you've only got two hundred thousand left. Add to that the twenty thousand or so you had left in the bank, and deduct your expenses while living on air and playing with Caddis, and what have you got? About \$217,000, that's what. In other words, you're short. You're something like twelve thousand dollars short of schedule. You—"

"Well, that's only twelve thousand dollars, isn't it? Approximately, I've got—"

"Only twelve thousand! Only! So you're getting high ideas about twelve thousand dollars, hey? Only twelve thousand! A mere trifle! Chicken-feed! Pin-money! And how many people in these United States do you think ever saw that *mere* twelve thousand dollars at one time in their lives? I'll tell you—not five per cent. Not three per cent. Not even one per cent, boy. You could support twelve families for a year on that much money. Bah! You make me sick! And now you want to go out on your own, like a boy buying his first suit of clothes. Yah, yah, yah! Cocky, conceited little fool boy, that's what!"

NOW Bentley was white with anger. "Very well," he said; and it was a great effort. "Very well, Mr. Brood. If that's the way you feel about it. But you're wrong. You're wrong to keep me chained. You're trying to prove a formula, but you've got it all wrong. Your formula's all right, but you're proving it wrong. It isn't real. It isn't life. A man going out and facing life doesn't have anybody to think for him, does he? Has to do it himself, doesn't he? It isn't enough to have a formula. A man has to stand on his own feet, doesn't he? But I'm under contract to you; and if that's the way you want it, all right. . . . Only—only I'm pretty sorry. Pretty disappointed, Mr. Brood."

You have seen a rubber bladder deflate. It puffs, it sighs, it sags, it wabbles; then it goes flat. Brood was like that. He stared at Bentley, almost in incredulity. Then he said, very slowly:

"That—that's right, boy. That's perfectly right. And I—I'm an old fool, boy. An old fool, that's what."

Bentley was suddenly sorry. "I didn't mean quite that, Mr. Brood," he said.

"Yes, you did. Don't be pussy with me. You meant what you said, because it's right. I've been a stubborn old fool, boy. That's what. This book is the biggest thing in an old man's life, boy. I want it right. I don't want it to be just another gag. I spent my life finding out about Personal Mystery. That's it; it's big. It's important. I might make all the soap in the world, and still be just another old dub when I'm gone. Nobody would care. Nobody would remember. I don't want that, boy. I want Personal Mystery to be real. Want you to make it that way, boy."

"I'd like to try it, sir."

"Got any plan, boy?"

"Sort of. Not very definite—yet. I wanted to try out something of my own."

"Hm-m-m. What's your idea, boy?"

There it was—slap, right at him. Right up to him. No getting around it now.

"Well, sir," he began, "you see, I—well, I sort of felt that I've got my teeth in it now, sir. I was thinking that a fellow could go out and just make himself noticed in some way, and then people would make him into things—just the way you always said. Only—only a fellow ought to put himself into situations."

"I see. And what situations?"

"Why—I hadn't figured one out, for sure. I wasn't certain you'd even listen to me."

"Hm-m-m. Well, I'm listening."

"Well, I mean—suppose a fellow walked down Fifth Avenue in bare feet—otherwise well dressed, I mean. He'd draw attention. They'd all wonder why he did it. If he didn't explain, they'd supply the reason. That's what I mean, sir. Not to go around in bare feet, exactly, but something like that. I'd have to figure it out."

Then suddenly the situation changed. Ephraim Brood began to laugh.

"Bare feet, hey? Ha-ha-ha! Bare f-f-feet! Oh, my word! Oh, my stars!"

Bentley sensed a misunderstanding.

"I don't *really* mean bare feet," he said. "I mean something just as—"

Brood held up a hand.

"All right, boy," he said with effort. "That's all right. Don't tell me. Let me be surprised. Bare feet is a good idea. Fine idea, boy. Not very dignified, perhaps, but on the right track. Bare feet on Fifth Avenue, bless my soul! Ha-ha-ha! If you thought of that one, boy, you'll do. I take my hands off. I give you a month—all to yourself. No help from me. No advice. No situations. You get out of here and start working. Make your own Personal Mystery situation—make it and solve it. We'll see if you've got the stuff, boy. Go to it. Come back in a month—and with seventy-eight thousand dollars, boy. That's what you have to make. I don't care how you get it, but do it. Any old way, so long as it's honest, and uses the formula. Go ahead, boy. . . . Bare feet! Bless my soul!"

DREAMING or wishing or playing make-believe to yourself is one thing. But when suddenly your dream comes



"Put it down in your little book, friend. This is the day you saw the sign of Destiny."

true and you find yourself staggeringly confronted by the very thing you've been pretending, it's often disconcerting.

"Well," Bentley told himself that evening, as he sat alone in his hotel room, "I asked for it; and now I've got it. So what am I going to do with it?"

There seemed to be no immediate answer.

"That idea of bare feet," he reasoned, "isn't just the trick. It would be mysterious, all right, but it wouldn't lead anywhere. Too funny. All I'd get, after all, is my picture in the papers and a big laugh—or else pinched for indecent exposure on something. Not to mention a case of gripe. No, that isn't it. But what? What kind of a gag is it?"

And still the answer remained obscure.

Obscurity prevailed, in fact, all evening. Half the night Bentley tossed in his bed, still puzzling with his tiring brain over some ruse, some trick, some "gag," (his constant word for it) which would:

- (a) Present him to a large public in a manner both spectacular and mysterious, yet with a certain dignity.
- (b) Permit that same public to formulate a concept of him which would, if properly handled, bring him advantages of a pecuniary nature.

But in the gray morning of midwinter, came only more complete bafflement and confusion. Nothing came to him. His mind, creatively speaking, was a blank.

It would not do, Bentley knew very well, to linger about the hotel. Now that Jaffley, having acquired sufficient funds to continue his experiments with his gas-substitute for steam, no longer resided at the hotel, it was not safe to be seen unaccompanied. His One-eyed Highness and the man called Rossenisch (still Ross, to Bentley) and the other minions of a foreign government, might still be lingering around and probably were. "They," he sensed wisely, would never quite forget a fifty-thousand-dollar check collected where none should have been collected at all. Nor would they be likely to allow it to go unpaid in coin of their own making.

So it was the crowded neighborhood of "theatrical" Broadway that he sought, where eddying throngs would serve as a kind of protection—not absolute, he knew, but well enough for the moment.

IT was late in the afternoon, that day. Bentley had walked the frozen streets from Columbus Circle to Forty-second, window-shopping, peering into crowded doorways and theater lobbies, speculating about the crowds and their atoms, and most intensely wishing that some illuminating flash would brighten his mind just long enough to supply that elusive plan which he had promised Brood he would supply and carry out.

He was tired. And he yielded to a subtle urge which, however useless, can and does, under similar circumstances, beset the best of us: He decided to have a drink.

He crossed Broadway, entered a well-known hostelry and seated himself at the bar. The kindly yet sophisticated face of a barman loomed.

"Howdy, Mister. What'll it be?" came the question. But Bentley did not answer. His thoughts were elsewhere.

Roving restlessly, his eyes caught sight of a large electric display sign which flashed intermittently through the winter fog across Times Square, advertising a popular movie. An idea was born, then and there. Such things happen.

To the inquiring barman he said, suddenly:

"You see that sign over there, Jack?"

"Yes sir; that's a swell show, too."

Barmen are professionally willing to chatter.

"Wrong," said Bentley. "That's not a show; that's an epoch in the march of Destiny."

"Huh?" said the barman doubtfully. Maybe this young lad was drunk. You never can tell. He stared at the sign which flashed intermittently through the broad plate glass of the tavern's front window. "What say, boss?" he asked again. "What'll I serve yuh?"

"Look at it," ordered Bentley. "Don't ever forget it. You can tell your grandchildren about it some day."

The barman stared suspiciously at Bentley. This bird must be way out in the fog! He leaned over the bar in his kindest fashion and touched Bentley on the shoulder as he whispered:

"Say, buddy, you feel kinda low, hey? Well, I gotta swell pick-me-up that'll clear your head in a coupla minutes. What say I fix yuh one, huh?"

"Tell 'em," Bentley insisted, ignoring the solicitous publican and gazing intently at the sign, "tell 'em you saw it happen. Tell 'em you were there. You knew him when. Put it down in your little book, friend. This is the day you saw the sign of Destiny."

This was a worse case than the bar-keeper cared to cope with alone. He flung a last look at the electric sign over his shoulder as he scuttled toward the end of the bar to communicate with the manager. The sign winked at him twice, but it was a very simple sign. You couldn't make anything queer out of that. It was just the name of one of those Hollywoodized stories about the trials, loves and tribulations of medical internes which are thrust upon a defenseless public a few times yearly. It read, simply: "HEROES IN WHITE."

SALISBURY PURCELL, that columnist of hard-boiled sentiment, wrote the following comment in his "Up-and-Down-Broadway" department of the *New York Chronicle* for January 18:

Folks dinnering at Jock Lamley's thirst emporium last night were mildly panicked by a young gent who is either an agreeable nut on the lam from some institution, or has a brand-new advertising racket which we, for one, don't quite understand. This gent arrived in an entirely white automobile, driven by a white-uniformed chauffeur, and pranced into Jock's place all decked out in white from hat and benny to shiny white shoes. He bought himself a six-dollar dinner with milk on

the side. After which he bought all the white chrysanthemums in the posy-girl's basket and had headwaiter Alphonse distribute them to everybody in the place. We supposed, at first, this was an advertising brain-storm of the management's, but Jock denied it. Expensive kind of publicity, whatever it is. Makes us wonder if we're being taken in. This White Boy may be just a harmless drunk, but we fear Greeks bearing gifts.

On January 19, Selex Milcott, theater-reviewer, commenting on the première of "Mighty Lak' a Rose," at the Orpheus, reported the following incident in the *Times-Telegraph*:

And as if a show which is merely maudlin and badly done at that were not enough to rout a tired audience, the play must be interrupted at its only plausible moment in the middle of Act One when a young imbecile, affecting a costume of white evening dress, entered and provoked a general whispering which lasted through the first intermission. If this gentleman is seeking public notice, he is painfully successful.

On January 21, the roving photographer of the *Current-Dispatch* snapped a candid shot of the same mysterious young man in white apparel as he descended from his impressive white limousine at the entrance to the Public Library.

Printed in the first edition of January 22, this excellent snapshot portrays the young eccentric wearing a magnificently tailored overcoat of white cheviot with a hat of white velour, while a monocle on a white ribbon and a cane of some ivorylike material completed the general effect. The camera also caught a gaping group of bystanders who had gathered to stare at the young man, typical of his magnetic effect upon the community.

The snapshot was given the caption:

HERE'S YOUR WHITE KNIGHT,
GIRLS!

Manhattan is puzzled over the identity of the white-clad young man (above), who surrounds himself with a mystery as virginal as his white costume. Refusing to explain himself and his purpose to reporters, he answers their questions as to the meaning of his white attire, by, "Well, why not white?"

This name "White Knight" seemed to catch the public fancy. There being neither a good, sultry murder nor a kidnapping, nor even a rumor of war im-



mediate in Europe at the moment, the newspapers found the unidentified gentleman a seven-day blessing, and gave him what, in the language of the city-room, is called "the works." Just how he eluded them before ducking out of sight is not known, but for an entire week no reporter however sleuthful was able to track him to his habitat nor to discover where he garaged his car. But the Disney-esque title of "White Knight" clung. He was reported diversely as an English nobleman, an Oriental potentate, a "Western gold-miner on a spree in New York," and a rising movie star on the make for public notice—and getting it. But these were merely hypotheses, and each successive one seemed to be a disproof of the preceding one.

One thing, however, seemed certain: this White Knight of popular fancy was a young man of wealth. Stories fantastic were pounded out by enthusiastic newspaper men. One columnist went so far as to estimate that the fellow's extravagances exceeded a thousand dollars daily—which of course was patently incredible and even absurd. Still, he did frequent the costliest night-clubs (promptly doubling their trade by the added attraction of his mysterious self), and he did spend almost every afternoon at the races,



where he was supposed to be betting astronomical sums on nags of his choice. Rumor, which has eyes and ears like a two-hundred-inch telescope, had it that the White Knight, among other qualifications, possessed a rare insight into racing lore—or "inside dope."

BUT it was evening that made this man-of-mystery seem well-nigh ubiquitous. He would appear at the Garden for every fight on the bills, buying half a row of ringside seats and sitting alone in the middle of them—and often as not sending a fifty-dollar bill between rounds to encourage one or the other of the fighters. He would appear at hockey-games likewise and ditto. He would be present at the matches of jai-alai at the Hippodrome. He would be the chief attraction at the opening of every new play—to the discouragement and annoyance of actors and critics. And far into the night or early morning hours, he could be followed by eager reporters from hot-spot to hot-spot, always alone, always affable and grinning, but never once betraying his identity nor taking any attitude other than that of a gentle "spoofing" toward the newspaper men.

"You fellows," he would say, "are ridiculous. You're making a lot out of nothing. Suppose I do wear white? I like it. It's a nice, clean color. Besides, whose business is it if I do? I don't see why I have to explain myself to you nor anybody else. Oh, I know you boys are just doing your job, but you can tell your editors for me that when their dear public finds out how their leg has been pulled, they're going to get a jolt. You boys are okay and I like you, only I wish you'd just leave me alone. Now I've ordered a round of drinks for everybody—at the bar. Help yourselves. It's all on me."

And then, while they were accepting his drinks, he would invariably slip out of the place, either to be discovered at another night-club in some other part of the city, where the same performance was repeated, or else to vanish into that secret limbo of nothingness where, supposedly, he lived in hiding.

Thus went the life of the White Knight of New York's romanticizing, for a fortnight. But of course it could not last.

It was the first day of February when Reporter O'Connell of the *Ledger*, hitherto assigned to other stories, was turned



The white-clad young man was followed into the circus by a crowd of children.

loose on this mystery. The *Ledger's* city-room had been informed by Baxter Bellows, noted circus-publicity man, that the White Knight had just purchased a string of twenty seats for the newly arrived "Biggest Show on Earth," and O'Connell had hurried to the opening. It happened quickly, and without preliminaries. O'Connell, from his press-box, saw the white-clad young man enter, followed by a crowd of children, from a public playground, who filed into the row of seats, a living testimonial (and perhaps a purposeful one) to the young man's philanthropic intentions as well as to his probable wealth.

O'Connell made his way, with other reporters, through a mob of gaping busybodies who stood about lionizing this man-of-mystery. Finally he managed to get himself face to face with the white-clad gentleman at his seat; and his colleagues of the press were both dismayed and astonished to see an unmistakable flash of mutual recognition between them. O'Connell stopped and grinned hugely. The White Knight is reported to have grown red in his pleasant face. The reporter, making an exaggerated salute, was overheard to say:

"Well, well, pal! Surprise, surprise! I mighta guessed it would be you. Just my Destiny, hey, pal? Say, the boys will be glad to hear about this."

And off he dashed before the disconcerted young man could make a reply.

"Hey, wait a minute—" That was as far as the White Knight could get, for O'Connell was already fighting through the crowd across the sawdust, presumably to the nearest telephone.

SO, next morning, as the other reporters both feared and expected, the *Ledger* broke the story, while many a Manhattanite tongue was set to clacking its I-told-you-so's.

NEW YORK'S "WHITE KNIGHT" DEBUNKED AS REPORTER SEES YOUTHFUL FRAUD AT CIRCUS

Neither incognito royalty nor Texas millionaire is this young notoriety-bound who has been kidding Manhattan with his white clothes and air of mystery for the last couple of weeks, and whom the press has dubbed the "White Knight."

Today, at Hookstraten's Animal Circus première, this reporter saw and recognized this newest of gold-brick experts as

Without warning, the shots came;
and three were stricken down.



an old acquaintance who is no stranger to the press at all, but rather an up-and-coming fortune-hunter come to America from abroad to look for some unsuspecting débutante to marry—provided she can support him in the style to which he would like to become accustomed.

This posing around in white is not the first nor yet the second gag which our inventive young shakedown artist has concocted for the purpose of getting himself free publicity. Give him credit, he is pretty good. But today the *Ledger* can positively identify the "White Knight" as one John J. Destiny, whose name, a while back, was coupled with that of society deb Lorraine Graymaster, recently embroiled in a legal mesh in the cause of her uncle, now in Mt. Hemon asylum. . . .

And there was more of the same. Much more. Reporter O'Connell, it seemed, had reason to dislike this young John Destiny, and he did not hesitate to display his antipathy. He pointed out that the young man, by employing measures likely to intrigue "big money interests" in Wall Street, had come out of the Southways Railroad fiasco with a comfortable (if somewhat questionable) fortune; that he had done this and done that, that he reeked of bluff and dishonor, that, in short, this business of appearing in white was unmistakably a come-on act before some delicately planned swindle by which one or more citizens of New York would be separated from their hard-earned dollars. And a

further series of articles was promised which should expose to the very blood-depths, this "debonair racketeer" who lurked inside the technicalities of the Law but was a constant menace to all decent, self-respecting, upright (and evidently moneyed) citizenry.

It seemed as if that story of O'Connell's touched off a fuse. Upon its heels came an explosion. Violence, drama and tragedy broke and flared. Out of that early, groping "human interest" story which had given birth to the White Knight myth, grew battle, murder and sudden death, a shock to the city and a boon to the tabloids.

THE following is clipped from the *News-Daily* of February 3, and it is the parallel of almost every story in practically every New York paper that day:

HIDDEN GUNS ROAR IN PARK AVENUE AS NUMBER-ONE GAG-MAN IS WOUNDED

So much for the tabloid banners. The story inside dripped with sulphur, gore and sarcasm:

New York, Feb. 3.—Three persons, among whom was John J. Destiny, alias the "White Knight," were wounded last evening when concealed guns shot into the crowded street in front of the Hotel Washington Towers. As we go to press, the police admit their inability to locate any spot from which gunfire could have been directed upon the sidewalk opposite the hotel entrance, but it is believed that the hidden gunmen were concealed in front rooms of the hotel itself.

Interviewed by the press and questioned by police investigators as he lay in the Eastend Hospital, Destiny disclaimed any knowledge of persons likely to attack him; but the police believe that he was, nevertheless, the object of this amazingly bold attempt to shoot down a citizen in broad daylight on a public highway which recalls the notorious St. Valentine's Day massacre of a few years ago.

Destiny, recently disclosed as New York's Number One bluffer, hoax and gag-man, received three flesh-wounds from bullets fired from overhead, upon which the police base their theory that he was the object of the attack. Two other men, one Silas Jondrell and one Franklin Amine, both business men, were also wounded, presumably by accident.

Having ordered the white car with which he created a legend concerning himself, Destiny stepped out in front of his hotel to smoke a cigarette, mixing momentarily with the crowd, many of whom stopped to stare at the figure who has been in the news for the last fortnight. Then, without warning, the shots came, and the three were stricken down. . . .

Although the police hold a tentative theory that Destiny, now recognized as one of the smartest within-the-law confidence-men in the city, may have had relations with gangdom and thus exposed himself to attack, he himself denies any such connection. . . .

It was disclosed that three rooms giving on Park Avenue were unoccupied at the time of shooting. Moreover, the preliminary tests of the police show evidence that nitrous fumes, possibly emanating from a known type of gunpowder, were present in those rooms forty minutes after the attack. Following this lead, the police are investigating hotel employees. . . .

It was hard, lying on one side only. Hospital beds have never been famous for their softness, and with his arm suspended by a weight-and-pulley arrangement to relieve pressure on the tendons of his wounded shoulder, Bentley was feverish with discomfort. Still, there was some good in the ill wind. At least, the hospital would keep reporters away from him for another couple of days, although the detective sergeant with his sneering, caustic and obviously incredulous air, seemed to get by the door in spite of the doctor's ruling.

Stubborn, these cops. They *wanted* to believe things. Had their minds all made up, too. Wanted to read crime

and gangsters and underworld connections in everything he did and was. Had no sense of humor.

"Listen, bud," the sergeant had said, only half an hour ago. "Don't make it tough for me, see? And we'll give you the best break we can. Everybody knows you're a phony. That's no news now. The *Ledger* breaks that story day before yesterday, and last night somebody takes a pot-shot at you. You can't dodge that one, son. Somebody put the bee on you because they figure you blabbed or pulled a boner. Now come on, spill it. If you're in the clear—if you didn't pull any dirty stuff yourself, we'll give you a clean break. This gunman stuff, right in New York streets, has gotta stop. Hell, it mighta been machine-guns. They mighta killed women and children. Aint you got no sense of decency at all, bud? Come on, now, spill—give! I'll listen."

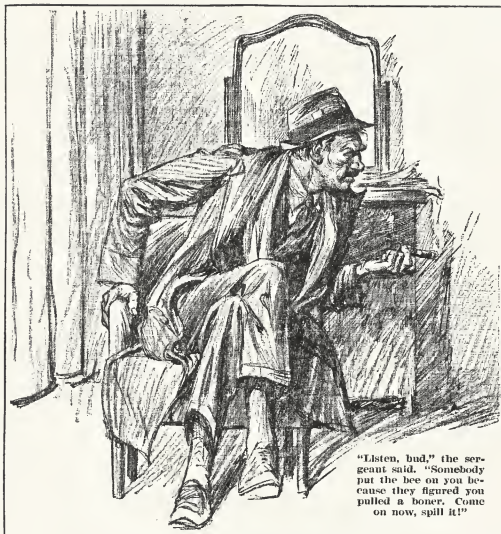
And for the hundredth time Bentley had wearily denied any knowledge of gangsters, while the detective fumed.

"You'll be outa this hospital in a coupla days, son," he insisted. "When we get you over at headquarters, you'll talk, all right. Better talk now. Make things easier all around."

And what could he say to that?

Not a nice thought upon which to try to sleep, with holes in his shoulder and wounds in his soul. Secretly, he knew the answer. Not gangsters: that was as fantastic as he had insisted it was. But if he should tell the police the real reason for the attack, they would either not believe it at all, or he would be swept by a wave of circumstances into a maelstrom of accusations, charges, suspicions and impossible realities which might shake the whole country. Imagine trying to explain away His One-eyed Highness and the staff of bearded murderers. That was all sheer movie-stuff—intrigue, espionage, military secrets—every gag on the list. You couldn't make the cops swallow that. Also, what about Lorraine Graymaster? And her uncle?

CLEARLY, it was O'Connell's fault. Bentley blamed himself for that, too. It had been fun playing the White Knight rôle. In the exhilaration of it he had forgotten Reporter O'Connell. But it was bound to happen sometime, somewhere, sooner or later. If any reporter in New York would recognize him, it would be O'Connell. The white suits and all that crazy hocus-pocus had served as a kind of mask to shield him from Ross



"Listen, bud," the sergeant said. "Somebody put the bee on you because they figured you pulled a boner. Come on now, spill it!"

and his gang—for a while. But the minute the *Ledger's* story appeared, of course—

The little telephone beside his bed started buzzing then. The crisp voice of Miss Brophy, the floor-nurse, was saying:

"Visitor for you, Mr. Destiny. I realize it's out of hours, but this gentleman seems impatient and anxious. Now, if you feel strong enough—"

"Who is it?"

"A Mr. Leris—he said you might not know the name. A business matter, I take it. Dr. Manly says you can—"

"Send him in," said Bently. Anything would be better than this monotony, this constant puzzling and worrying and thinking. Leris—Leris—the name made no echo in his recollection. Probably some salesman. Maybe a smart reporter using a new gag to get in. Well, let him

come. He'd have to talk to the press sooner or later.

But it was not the press.

The man who entered, hat in hand, had nothing in common with the half-swagger, half-brazen mannerism which often typifies the newspaper man. To the contrary, he seemed at once to fall into the niche of business. He had a brisk, efficient atmosphere about him, which lingered in his speech as he said:

"Ah, good afternoon, Mr. Destiny. I hope I'm not making myself a nuisance." And to the nurse who followed him in: "Now, if we could have just a moment in private, nurse, I should be greatly obliged."

Nurse Brophy resented his tone, but she departed none the less. Bentley remained silent. Who the devil was this Leris? Ought he to know? Could it be one of—"them?"



Leris moved the only chair which the room afforded close to Bentley's bed.

"Let me state at once, sir," Leris began, "that I am not acting for myself but for some one who shall—ah—remain nameless in our conversation. I regret having to talk with such a handicap, but—ah—my principal being who he is—ah—it is vastly better that way."

"Well," said Bentley, "I can only listen."

"Indeed, indeed. . . . Yes, indeed," Leris murmured. "Your rather interesting—ah—performance of the past two weeks has attracted considerable—ah—attention."

Bentley grinned ruefully. "That seems obvious," he said, with a gesture which included the whole hospital room. "So what?"

"I mean favorable attention," stated Leris.

"Favorable? Not according to the newspapers."

"None," said Leris sententiously, "can venture to stand out from his fellow-men without consequences. You have made yourself—ah—eccentric. You're paying for it. But that is not what I'm here to discuss."

"So?"

Leris drew his chair forward. "I imagine you are interested in—ah—making money, Mr. Destiny?" It was only a partial question.

"Who isn't?" Bentley countered.

Leris smiled blandly. "My principal is convinced, young man, that you have a rare gift—that of imagination. In the language of the psychologists, *motor*-imagination, as opposed to the mere *static* imagination of the multitude."

There seemed nothing to say in reply, and Bentley waited. Leris went on:

"In the peculiar business in which my principal is a commanding power, such fertility of imagination is—ah—almost priceless. Your recent newspaper publicity, even though adverse in its way, is likewise a priceless asset, properly handled. In short, Mr. Destiny, I am empowered to offer you an opportunity to affiliate yourself with a nation-wide organization—at an excellent salary."

BENTLEY'S New England horse-trader ancestry spoke for him rapidly. Here was the result of a cause. Here was the perfect, the "natural" result of Personal Mystery. Now he had it, what would he do with it?

"I see," he said cautiously. "But tell me, Mr. Leris, has your principal considered that I might come—rather high? I am not precisely a poor man. My time is worth considerable. I say this frankly. I want no misunderstanding when it comes to talking money."

Leris smiled knowingly. "At fifty thousand a year, young man—"

Bentley stopped him.

"I imagined you would make such an error," he said. "My time is worth exactly \$2,600 a day, Mr. Leris. Not only that, but I have entered into a considerable expense and time-loss to conduct this little experiment which you please to call an eccentricity. I'm interested in making money, well enough, but believe me, sir, I'm out of the fifty-thousand-a-year-class. I'm afraid your principal has a bit underestimated my earning capacity. This is not a stall nor a boast. I'm merely stating a fact. I appreciate your effort and your kindness in coming here, sir; but my actual profession, until better offers itself, is sufficiently remunerative."

"Twenty-six-hundred—a day!" Leris lost composure. "That amounts to a million a year, sir."

"Exactly."

"You don't," said Leris, slowly and archly, as though talking to a very young man indeed, "expect me to believe that?"

Bentley smiled brightly. "No," he said, "I don't." And he added, while Leris stared: "Or rather, I don't much care whether you do or not. A man has his own price, Mr. Leris. I have named mine. It strikes me that I'm in the position of holding a seller's market. Put it straight: I will work for you, or your principal, or the Shah of Persia—on my own terms. That means any part of a million dollars for the relative portion of a year. That or nothing. And now, sir,

since that seems to stagger you, perhaps we'd better end this interview. Frankly, I'm tired and a little weak—"

Leris stood up, open-mouthed. It was plain that in his entire lifetime—possibly some fifty years—he had never been confronted with such a glib exhibition of megalomania. This young man was, evidently, crazy. The very idea of any such amount was preposterous. Still—

"Very well, Mr. Destiny," he said, pausing a moment. "I'm afraid there has been a misunderstanding somewhere. But—but for my personal curiosity, perhaps—would you be good enough to tell me the nature of this—ah—profession, you called it—which pays you on such a fantastic scale?"

Bentley said, as evenly as he might:

"That, I'm afraid, will have to remain a mystery—a sort of Personal Mystery. . . . But good afternoon, Mr. Leris. And thank you. My compliments to your—ah—principal. And my regrets. He has come just four months too late."

Leris left. It was evident as he went out the door that he felt safer outside than in. He wore the expression of a man who has just confronted a phenomenon; and perhaps, indeed, he had.

VERY likely you have never heard of Pinkton. To those motoring transcontinentally, Pinkton is but the location of "just another tourist camp," where a none-too-clean restaurant offers what it pretentiously calls "eats" at prices you never forget until you finally reach the Coast. Largely, you tarry not. You stifle your appetite with your indignation, step on your starter, and roar off, leaving Pinkton to its devious ways—and prices. Since the main highway does not lead through Pinkton's streets, you give the place a puff of your exhaust, and merely let it be.

But Pinkton has nation-wide importance, none the less. Scoff at it, sneer at it, despise it, hate it; you can't quite live without Pinkton.

For Pinkton of Pinkton is, despite your cavalier treatment of the name and place, a vast national influence. Time was when the town itself was merely called "Rotten Springs," an unlovely but graphic name. For under what is now the vast factory site of Pinkton's, Inc., bubbles a spring whose aroma—not to say whose stench—has made untold millions of dollars for the enterprise of Senator Axel G. Pinkton (Dem.) and has, according to advertising, kept the entire nation free

of unpleasant consequences of overeating, *i.e.* gastric disorders.

Now, of course, you know. Pinkton, is the home of *Pinkwater*, that faintly nauseous bottled water whose vile taste is supposed to signify the presence of sulphur, bismuth, iron and an unending list of other minerals. Pinkwater has been upon your table since childhood. When, an infant, you screamed with colic and temper, Pinkwater was administered. When, in your youth, mince pie or other rich foods upset you, Pinkwater was poured down your protesting gullet by stern Mamma and Papa. In later years, when you had imbibed too deeply of the cup that sometimes cheers, and suffered from the morning-after effect, you sent out to the nearest drugstore for a bottle of Pinkwater. . . . And you still buy Pinkwater when your stomach squirms.

Needless to say that Axel G. is a rich man. Just how rich he is, nobody seems sure. Since he has been elected to the U.S. Senate,—and therefore required by law to desist from active participation in any financial enterprise,—it must not be supposed that he has become impoverished. Far from it. Senators have a way of heeding the letter of the law whilst the spirit goes begging. Still, let us hush this suggestion, since if it were generally known, Senator Pinkton could scarcely count upon the Liberal vote next election.

As a man of great wealth, Axel G. Pinkton is doubtless entitled to his idiosyncrasies. Entitled or not, he has them and to spare. And not the least of these is a sort of feudal-lord manner of dominating everything and everybody who comes in contact with him.

THE trouble at Pinkton's, Inc., began with the unexpected arrival of Senator Pinkton himself. Senator Pinkton's arrival followed directly upon the release of the past year's sales-report, a document which the Board of Directors strove vainly to keep secret, but which Mr. Tom Leris, always faithful to the Senator, managed to send to Washington. That sales-report showed a falling-off in the consumption of bottles of Pinkwater from an even two hundred million the previous sales year, to a mere 167,889,436; and that falling off in bottles betokened an allied decrease in gross income which begat a similar decrease in Axel G.'s personal income. Hence the fireworks.

Axel G. arrived in early February like the March lion. A startled board of di-

rectors shook in their shoes. The entire sales-force was dismissed out of hand. An advertising manager under contract for five years at thirty-five thousand dollars yearly found himself a candidate for a W.P.A. job.

"You get out of here," raged Pinkton. "You're through. Don't give me any guff about contracts. I'll *contract* you! Sue and be damned."

IN fact, when the storm was over, Pinkton's, Inc., was minus both sales and advertising staff, and young Percy Pinkton, nephew of the Senator, who had been given a nominal presidency, found it expedient to depart for Miami on an extended rest-cure; and an entire Board of Directors found themselves reduced to the status of mere minority leaders in a corporation which could be called little less than "closed." True, the Senator could not officially hold office in his company; but there was the Senator unofficially doing just that thing, and they could like it or lump it. They lumped it.

"What I want," growled the Senator, "is a young man with imagination."

Mr. Tom Leris, the perfect yes-man, sighed and said:

"Yes sir."

"There's only one feller in the country that has enough imagination to come indoors when it's wet. I don't know who he is, but he's been kidding New York for a couple of weeks. I mean this White Knight feller."

"A very smart crook, it seems, sir," purred Tom Leris.

"Crook, nothing," countered the Senator. "That's all newspaper poppycock. You go to New York and get that lad out here. I want him."

Tom Leris stared blankly.

"Go get him, I said. Hop a plane this afternoon and bring him here tomorrow. Pay him what he wants—fifty thousand dollars a year ought to bring him. Go get him—hear? On your way."

And Tom Leris was on his way. . . .

It is quite possible to imagine the smug feeling of I-told-you-so which ripened in Mr. Tom Leris as he flew back to Pinkton, via Springfield, planning his announcement of what had occurred in New York in connection with this White Knight idea, the Senator's latest brain-storm. For this was not the first, nor yet the second brainstorm of that exceedingly brainstormy millionaire. Far from it.

Time was, for instance, when Axel G., suddenly returning to Pinkton to dis-



"Sh-h-h!" she said mysteriously.

cover a similar falling-off of Pinkwater sales, had ordered a full-grown gorilla to be hunted down and caught and shipped from darkest Africa, so that he might haul the caged beast from metropolis to metropolis as a *significant* (his own word) advertisement for the nation's gastric remedy. He had done this, moreover, despite Tom Leris' admonitions; and it had turned out to be a sad flop. For not only was the application of gorillas to odorous spring-water a bit far-fetched, but the gorilla, when it arrived, turned out to be no gorilla at all, but a much tamer ape, and when given its first bottle of Pinkwater, it drank, moaned and died, leaving an abortive advertising scheme high in the air.

Again, the Senator once had conceived a whole fleet of one hundred aircraft, all to fly over the continent, leaving a smoke-written trail anent the merits of Pinkwater behind them for the education

of non-Pinkwater drinkers. Vainly Mr. Leris had remonstrated that the cost was tremendous and the merit of the scheme dubious. The Senator had conceived it, and do it he would. He did, in part. Planes and pilots were hired. Vast publicity was released. But when the Senator, acting on the time-worn theory that salesmen should be convinced of the merits of their own product, insisted that the pilots, before taking off, drink one quart each of Pinkwater, things went wrong. The result was pure panic. The details need not be included here.

And so now this White Knight brainstorm was to prove again how erratic was Senator Pinkton, and how sage was Mr. Tom Leris. Small blame to Leris if, being only human, he enjoyed a sly chuckle of satisfaction as he contemplated telling "the old man" of this young scoundrel Destiny's presumptuous—and amazing!—value of his time at a million dollars yearly.

"If he cannot see now what a cheap little crook that lad is," said Leris to himself, "he's blind as a bat. I ought to get the next vice-presidency, into the bargain."

But Leris reckoned without the Senator.

"What's that?" roared Axel G., when Leris told the tale. "A million dollars a year? Do you want to ruin me? You blankety-blankety-blankety so-and-so—" Unsenatorial, but positive.

"Indeed no," said Tom Leris. "Of course I merely walked out on him. Naturally, I wouldn't let anyone hold you up that way, Senator. I imagine he's just a conceited young crank if not entirely crooked—"

"Oh, so you walked out on him?"

"Why yes, of course."

"And who'n'ell gave you authority to do that? Didn't I tell you to pay what he wants? Didn't I tell you to get him? I didn't say bargain with him. And any boy who has guts enough to refuse fifty thousand dollars and insist he's worth a million, by Godfrey, must be pretty good. You hop the next plane back again. Shut up, now—none of your nice-nelly mumbly. I know what I'm doing. And I still run things around here, don't forget that, Tom Leris. Back you go, I say."

"I'M sorry," Bentley was telling the hotel manager, "but that's the way I feel about it. Mind you, I don't for one minute suppose your hotel is responsible for the shooting; but whoever it was

knows only too well that I live here, and they won't wait to do it again, even if they don't shoot from your own windows next time. I was lucky to get off with a broken collarbone and a couple of pints of lost blood, and I don't want any more of the same."

"But I can absolutely assure you, Mr. Destiny—"

"Thanks. Don't bother. There's more to it than that. You can't assure me against half the newspaper reporters in the city piling in here every hour of the day and night. You can't keep thugs from plugging me out in the street. I'm in wrong with the police and in wrong with the press—just because I like to wear white; and I don't want—"

"But we never supposed that you were the White Knight!"

"I didn't want you to. It was fun while it lasted, but I've paid for it. Paid high, too. I'm moving. Just make up my bill and I'll settle it."

"But Sergeant McBride insists—"

"I'll report to the Sergeant. That's not your worry. Get me my bill."

BENTLEY had regrets about leaving the Washington Towers; and he had more regrets about his general situation. Take that queer offer for fifty thousand dollars, now—out of the blue sky, it had come. Certainly he had muffed that pretty badly. Imagine him, Bentley Dewert, the city's worst reporter, who didn't have a dollar bill to his name three months ago, actually turning down a fifty-thousand-dollar job!

And now he was in a fix. The police were dogging him. He had a summons, delivered at the hospital, to appear at Headquarters next morning. Two plain-clothes men shadowed him whenever he went out. The newspapers were crawling over him, to pin anything and everything on him. This O'Connell had an elephant's memory—and a bloodhound's purposefulness. The next three stories he had done for the *Ledger* had painted John Destiny as just about the greatest thief unchanged—all by implication. He had found out about Colonel Jossop, for instance. He had insinuated that Destiny had double-crossed Ed Ryster in the Southways deal, hence caused the broker's suicide. One more article like that, and people might mob him in the streets.

Then the telephone rang.

"A Mr. Leris to see you, sir," announced the room-clerk's voice, and Bentley felt a quake of astonishment.

"Send him up, of course." Leris—wasn't that the man's name who had offered him that fifty thousand? Of course it was. Now what in thunder—

MR. LERIS was even more blunt. He did not relish this job.

"I confess," he stated, "that I am quite as surprised to be here as you may be to see me, Mr. Destiny. It is a very irregular situation. Very irregular indeed."

"Yes? And what is it, sir?"

Leris did not take the proffered seat but stood uneasily, like a man nervous lest his watch be snatched.

"My—ah—principal seems to imagine—" he began, but changed his presentation of the same fact. "Bluntly, I made my report to my principal, young man, with the added statement that any person who seeks to hold up another for a million-dollar salary, is either crazy or a crook—or both. But my principal, sir, is—ah—an eccentric. I regret to say so, but it is the case. He has some deluded idea that you might just be worth the money. He urges me to bring you to him at once."

"Oh," said Bentley; and what else was there to be said?

"Exactly," said Mr. Leris unhappily.

"And who is your principal, Mr. Leris?"

"His name, at present, is unnecessary."

"Indeed? Why?"

"Because it is a name too well known, too powerful, to be bandied about by every pretentious young jackanapes who might by some device, catch his imagination. He is an aging man."

Bentley hesitated. It was hard to know just how to act. Finally he came to a decision.

"Well," he said, "it was nice of you to come. Good morning, Mr. Leris." And he turned to his opened valise and began rearranging his piles of socks. Leris stared. Leris gaped. Leris was disconcerted. This was not according to the book. Crooks on the make do not hesitate when talk is of a million dollars.

"Do I—do I understand that you—won't come with me?"

"Nothing else but. How do I know what kind of a guy your principal is? Take your word for it? How do I know I'll like him? I don't like you much, frankly. Twice and more, you've called me a crook—practically. If you were a younger man, Mr. Leris, I would be tempted to toss you out of the window. I don't like your insinuations, and I don't

like you, and I don't believe I'd like your principal, either."

"But—but—" Leris was confused. This young man was certainly a departure from Hoyle. "But according to the newspapers—"

"Ah? So you read the newspapers!"

"Naturally. And my principal—"

"Can go to hell, for all of me, Mr. Leris. I'm a fussy sort of guy and I never work for anybody I don't know and like. If he wants to come out from behind his false-face and make me an offer in his right name, maybe I'll play ball. But not until. Clear?"

Leris opened his mouth to reply, but Bentley broke in:

"Besides, I can't leave here, anyhow. I've got a flock of dates with the police. They seem to be under the impression that I'm a public enemy with the crown jewels of Russia up my sleeve. So don't let me detain you, Mr. Leris."

VERY badly, this was going. Leris was caught in a most embarrassing mesh. Obviously, he could not return empty-handed to Pinkton now. But just as obviously, too, he could not reveal the Senator's name. Suppose this young adventurer should talk to the press. Give the newspapers a line like that on the Senator, and it would mean political ruin. Still, Leris did not fancy facing Axel G. without bringing this young Destiny with him. It would be just putting his head into the lion's mouth. So he tried another tack.

"My principal is—ah—extremely influential, young man; he could easily have all charges against you dropped. He could even hush the newspapers."

"Dear, dear!" drawled Bentley with ripe sarcasm. "Don't tell me he's a big shot in politics. Or would he be one of those all-powerful racketeers you see in the movies?" Then he whirled with a dark frown at the dapper business man, adding: "Get this straight, Mr. Leris: I don't need a fixer. I'm not guilty of anything, and I don't want to get mixed up in any smelly political fixes."

"But really!" Leris was scandalized. Senator Axel G. Pinkton a racketeer! "But really, sir, I must resent such an attitude. My principal is one of the most upright and public-minded citizens in this country."

"Okay," Bentley broke in. "Call him anything you like. Only leave me alone right now. I'm pretty busy. And this may be my last day out of jail."

Just what reply Mr. Leris might have made to that is problematical, for at that moment Bentley's door-buzzer announced a solicitous floor-boy bearing a sheaf of letters.

"They thought some of these might be important, sir—at the desk, I mean," babbled the boy. Evidently the desk was doing its bit to impress Mr. Destiny with the comforts of the hotel's service. Bentley thanked him and dismissed him, and did not notice the peculiar tip-inviting gleam in the boy's eye. Ignoring Leris as though he had already gone, he tossed the letters on the table carelessly, then reached for them again.

"Hi!" he exclaimed. "Such popularity!"

One envelope bore the impressive stamp of the great Hollywood film company, *Polynational Pictures, Inc.* Tearing it open, he found a brief note but a lengthy contract form within. The note was signed by the secretary of some casting director and bluntly offered Mr. Destiny a ten-week contract at five hundred dollars weekly to "collaborate with our writing staff in the construction of a scenario based upon your recent escapades." It also, for the same consideration, offered to accept all rights, American and foreign, cinematographic and television, book and theatrical, upon any biographical material which Mr. Destiny could furnish.

Bentley tossed the letter to Leris.

"Your famous principal isn't the only one, my friend," he said, and proceeded to open other letters. He grinned. It seemed, suddenly, that the whole world wanted him for something. A magazine made him a modest offer for his "story." A music-hall offered him a renewable contract for a month of appearing publicly. A wildcat cigarette firm solicited his testimonial on their newest brand.

He grinned, but his grin went sour. Suddenly the whole thing revolted him. Damn them for a bunch of ghouls! They all acted as though they had no doubt at all as to his acceptance. As though he were just a small racketeer in trouble, and that anything would do so long as there was money in it. The same kind of mentality that offers contracts to girls who get freed after killing their boyfriend. Morbid show-off-ism.

THEN the telephone rang again. Leris still lingered, undecided, puzzled, not understanding this young man at all, and yet not daring to leave empty-handed.

The voice over the wire was low, musical, feminine.

"Mr. Destiny?" it asked. "Oh, I must talk to Mr. Destiny."

Bentley's heart skipped a beat or two. His own voice was suddenly tight and hard to manage.

"Hello," he said. "Oh—hello—Lorraine."

He had not intended to use the name, but it slipped out somehow. She was suddenly, talking fast and excitedly, not, perhaps, even noticing that he had spoken her name.

"You've got to go away," she was saying. "You must go away—somewhere—anywhere. . . . It isn't fair for you to be—in this. You must go away—"

SHE was talking too fast. She was trying too hard. Only snatches of it came through to him, but it made him curiously elated to hear even those.

"They'll never stop now—they'll never let you go. . . . You must get away—really must. And I must talk to you first, too. So many things have happened. Please, Mr. Destiny—"

"Just a minute," he said. "Hold the wire, please."

Then to Leris:

"Did I understand that your principal can call the police off while I have a chance to catch my breath? Is that right, Mr. Leris?"

Leris was nodding. Leris was on the point of launching into a panegyric of his "principal's" vast power. But Bentley was thinking rapidly now.

"And how far away is your principal? How far from this city do you want me to go?"

"Why—a thousand miles or so; but—"

"What station do we leave from?"

"Why—ah—the Newark airport. In fact I have—"

"Okay, Mr. Leris. I'll go. When can we catch a plane?"

"At three this afternoon."

He would have said more, but Bentley had already turned his back and was saying into the phone:

"Now listen carefully, please, and don't try to answer, because you don't know who might be listening in. Anyhow, I am leaving here. I just decided this minute. I'm going a long way off, and I'm going fast—by plane. I can't tell you where I'm going, because I don't know, but I would like to talk with you before I get away. So if you will get over to the Newark Airport by two-

thirty, I'll meet you there—at the buffet—and we'll have a little time without being interrupted. Don't say anything now—just be there. Please do it, Lorraine. Please! And good-by for now."

And he hung up the telephone.

Mr. Leris was shocked in his sense of fitness of things.

"I—I might say that this is hardly—ah—the time for mixing social pleasures with—ah—business—" he began stolidly, but Bentley had the right answer.

"If it were really any of your business, Mr. Leris," he said, "you might take time out to think that it isn't necessarily social for a man to say good-by to—his sister."

Mr. Leris saw no reason why he should not grow pink in the face. . . .

The crowd around the buffet lunch at the airport was three deep. You had to fight your way through them to reach your hand in and exchange your dime for a mug of coffee and a doughnut; and the chances were against your getting these safely back where you could use them without mishap. The chances were equally against your ever being able to find anybody at all, much less recognizing, among twenty or more other girls, the face of a girl whom you've barely seen more than twice, save in your somewhat picturesque dreams.

It had been simple enough to get rid of Leris for the time being. Very obviously, Leris was a fussy sort of a fellow with a headful of details, the kind who would worry about reservations and tickets.

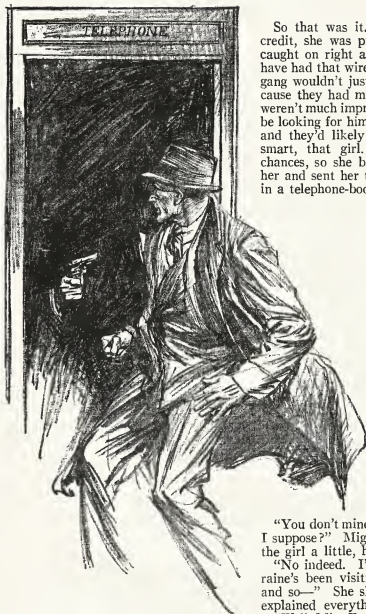
"You run along and fix things up," Bentley had urged. "I'll join you at the gate in time to get aboard."

And Leris, perhaps accustomed to being ordered about, pranced away, his mind on things essential.

Two-thirty—two-thirty-five—thirty-seven—two-thirty-five! Where in thunder was that girl? Didn't she have sense enough to come? Couldn't she understand that he was taking all kinds of a risk, just talking to her over the phone? Perhaps she had been—

A hand touched his sleeve.

"MR. DESTINY?" It was a mellow feminine voice, but it was not Lorraine Graymaster's voice. And the young woman who stood there, dressed in a swagger squirrel coat, was a far cry from the gray-eyed young lady whom the Fates had so persistently thrust into his life.



So that was it. Well, give Lorraine credit, she was pretty smart. She had caught on right away—somebody might have had that wire tapped. Ross and his gang wouldn't just drop the business because they had missed that once. They weren't much impressed by police. They'd be looking for him to run away, anyhow, and they'd likely tap his wire. Pretty smart, that girl. Wouldn't take any chances, so she brought somebody with her and sent her to fetch him. Waiting in a telephone-booth, eh?

"I wouldn't," said a voice which Bentley recognized only too easily, "move, if I were you, friend."

"That," he said cagily, "is the name I go by. What can I do for you?"

The young woman was undeniably attractive. Not his type, but almost painfully attractive.

"Oh," she said, "I'm so glad. I'd hate to make a blunder—it would be so embarrassing."

"But you wanted something? Just who—"

She cast a glance over-shoulder.

"Sh-h-h!" she said mysteriously. "Lorraine sent me. She's in the telephone-booth—over there. She didn't want to come right out here—you know why. You'd better hurry, too. She's pretty—well, upset."

"You don't mind telling me your name, I suppose?" Might as well check up on the girl a little, he thought.

"No indeed. I'm Doris Fermat. Lorraine's been visiting us out in Tuxedo, and so—" She shrugged, as if that explained everything.

"Well, Miss Fermat, lead on. I've only got a few minutes now. And thanks."

The girl nodded, and together they pushed out of the lunch-counter crowd.

THE phone-booth in question was well-located. It was an unusually large cabinet, and had been built between the gateway where the waiting-hall opens into the field, and the ladies' room. Bentley could wait until the last minute, if need be. It would be good to see Brown Curls again. Good to explain a few things to her. Warn her, too. Those foreigners would be keeping an eye open for her too.

"Two," said Miss Fermat, "is company. Tell Lorraine I'll be over here

when you two are through. And—good-by, Sir Galahad.”

She had a nice grin to go with her sense of humor. Lorraine would have girl friends like that. The girl waved him a cheery hand and walked away toward the door marked “Ladies,” and Bentley, conscious of pressing time, hurried to the telephone-booth.

IT was dark inside. Even the usual dim light seemed out of order, and the glare of the overhead lights outside made it impossible to see through the glass panels. However, Bentley opened the door eagerly.

“Hello!” he said brightly, stepping in. “Say, I thought you’d—”

And then he stopped short. A hand reached out of the darkness, and in the hand was something hard and round that pressed tightly against Bentley’s stomach.

“I wouldn’t,” said a voice which he recognized only too easily, “move, if I were you, friend.”

“Ross!” He said the word in a whisper. Another hand pulled at his arm, pressing him against the invisible gun’s barrel and drawing him farther into the booth.

It was a queer instant. Queer, if only that there were several hundred persons outside that booth, pushing each other and hurrying from ticket-office to gate and from baggage-window to the reservation-desk, and not one of them could have an inkling that a crime, perhaps murder, was on the point of being committed in a telephone-booth right under their noses.

Bentley went rigid. The invisible Ross tugged at his arm.

“Get in here, you fool,” he snapped. “Or do you want it right now?”

Rebellion flared in Bentley. To hell with him! Yes, and with all of them! They couldn’t push him around. Let him shoot, if he would. At least the chances were the cops would get him before he could get out of the airport. Let him shoot. Force his hand. Take one last chance, make one play. There’s always one little chance. Anyhow, if Ross was able, somehow, to get him out of the airport into a car and into the hands of that one-eyed wolf, he might just as well be dead. Better have it now. Damn them, they had cut in on that call. That girl was a fake, a decoy. He might have suspected it, anyhow. She had said “Lorraine,” and not “Lorrie.”

All those thoughts were crammed into a split second, although to Bentley, standing half in and half out of the dark booth, it seemed like slow motion. Then suddenly the loud-speaker from overhead somewhere was announcing:

“St. Louis plane, three-seven, now ready. Passengers will please take their places.”

And that sent Bentley into action.

It was his foot that lifted. He put everything into that kick, bending his body backward as he kicked out in the dark at an invisible Ross. He grunted with it. He gritted his teeth and let it drive with all the leverage of his body thrusting behind it, throwing himself to the left against the wall of the booth, praying that the shot, which he knew must come, would be a little wild, would only give him a slight flesh-wound.

He felt his foot strike something soft and yielding. He heard a grunt to answer his own grunt.

“Ach, Gott,” said a choked voice inside; and no shot came.

With the same motion, in the same rhythm as his kick, he shoved back with his hands and propelled himself backward from the booth, slamming the door. He stumbled in his own awkwardness, and rolled on the hard cement of the hall’s floor—while a crowd, always ready to find fun in the discomfort of others, grinned and laughed, seeing a plausible young man, presumably drunk, staggering out of a phone-booth and falling on his ear.

LET them laugh! Bentley scrambled up again and charged into them. Let them laugh—they could just be there and swallow him up. Human barrier. The people made a hiding-place. And when he plunged into them, shouldering one grinning fellow hard in the chest and plowing through them like a madman, their laughter changed promptly to something else.

“Hey, what the hell! Take it easy, buddy.”

But it worked. He got through them and got lost among them and got absorbed by them. Never so thankful for *hoi polloi*. God bless *hoi*, and let them *polloi* actively! Amen! For in short seconds there were dozens of persons, now angry and resentful of his jostling, standing between him and that telephone-booth, and he was pushing and running and shoving and fighting his way through the whole crowd of good-by-say-

ers, toward the gate where he could just see nervous Mr. Leris, watch in one hand, tickets in the other, waving to him to hurry.

And hurry he did, too.

"Cutting it pretty close, Mr. Destiny. We have just one minute and a half."

"Sure, I know," he panted. "Sorry, Leris, but I had some trouble—" And he babbled more ineffectual nonsense while Leris tugged at his sleeve.

"Cutting it pretty close," was he? Leris never would know just *how* close. But the grilled gate was closing, and the good-byes were being shrilled all over the place, and the guard was punching Leris' streaming length of tickets while Leris himself was shouting over his shoulder to Bentley. His voice came faintly, half-drowned by the roar of warming motors which came through the runway, but the general idea got over. Fussy little man, Bentley thought for a flash.

"Okay," he called puffingly, "I'll wait for you in the plane—grab you a chair."

Fussy old-maidish little man. Couldn't he *see* something was wrong? Cutting it pretty close! Bentley felt a little wave of resentment, but he held it back and pushed through the dozens of hurrying people, letting their bodies propel him down the cement incline from the depths of which came the muttering of the giant airplane, as though in contemplation of a long, disagreeable journey.

FUSSY little Leris, meanwhile, had trouble himself. A prankish little draft of wind sneaked around the corner and through the funnel-like passageway that leads down to the field, and plucked the streaming tickets out of his hand, just as the official had completed his inspection. Leris made a grab, missed them, lost his hat in his agitation, grabbed at that too, and missed it—scrambled for a moment on all fours, got his grip on the tickets and his foot on his hat, and came up red-faced, puffing and embarrassed. He was human enough to turn around to see if this young Mr. Destiny had caught his awkwardness, but he saw the young man's back and was relieved. Then he turned to follow him down the incline.

"Mister! Oh, Mister—"

Self-conscious, Mr. Leris stopped and stared and then flushed again. Of course there were other Misters. This pretty girl running through the crowd in the waiting-room could not be waving at him.

Stylish, pretty brown-haired maidens don't wave frantically at Tom Lerises. Or do they?

"Oh, Mister. . . . Please, Mister—"

She was running and waving and calling. She seemed almost in tears. And incredible as it seemed, she *was* calling Mr. Leris. Not that he knew her. Must be some mistake.

"Please, Mister—just a minute—"

MR. LERIS was old and safely married and practically incorruptible, but he stopped. Even after fifty, you always stop when a pretty girl calls.

"Yes, Miss?" The folding iron gate was closing and cutting her off from him, but he waited. "Yes, Miss?"

"There's a—a young man with you, isn't there? He just went down to the plane, didn't he? Please tell me, please do—it's terribly important—it was John Destiny, wasn't it? I've got to see him—"

So it was that young Destiny, was it? Not old Tom Leris, but young John Destiny. Impudent young pup, anyhow, having girl friends come down and delay him, have them running after him, confusing things, making him late, making people worry.

The gate shut with a click. The guard cried out:

"All aboard. . . . St. Louis, Kansas City, Denver. . . . Better shake a leg, Mister."

The girl was there, waiting, imploring with her eyes.

"Sorry, Miss," said Leris, "I'm afraid you've got the wrong man."

He turned his back on her and took a positive step back from the gate. None of his business. To the devil with young Destiny and his women! No business having women around. Might have missed the plane. What would the Senator say then?

A positive step, he took; but then behind him he heard a hard, ironical voice saying:

"My dear Miss Graymaster, fancy meeting you here!"

And then the girl screamed. She screamed a faint little helpless, hopeless scream, with her hand over her mouth. Leris was not interested in screaming women, but even his armor-proof had its flaws, and the scream made him turn.

Through the gate he saw nothing at all for her to scream at. There was a man standing there with his hat courteously off. It was a gray hat. The man wore

a gray coat. There was another woman with him, too—handsome dark type, wearing a squirrel coat. They were just standing there, looking at the girl who had been waving. Looking and smiling and bowing. Now what was the matter with the girl? She had nothing to scream about. Silly, hysterical females. Bah!

And Mr. Leris stamped off down the incline to the plane. It was high time.

Not a happy journey, that five-hour trip through the air across half a continent. Quite, in fact, to the contrary, and for strange reasons.

True enough, Bentley's physical self was comfortable. Lolling easily in the cushioned chairs of the big modern airliner, while the "great green carpet of America" (see the advertising booklets!) unfolded beneath him, it started off very well. The motors roared and snarled. Leris came trailing in late and was properly scolded by the pretty hostess for it. Bentley grinned inwardly. He did not like Leris much. Then the big plane lurched, shook, rolled off, sped across the field and climbed up to its eagle-perch in the air.

Bentley lolled. This was nice. This was peace. This was all right. Too bad he hadn't met Lorraine, though. Damn that Ross and his gang! Close shave, that was. Hoped he'd kicked him where it would be remembered.

THEN Leris was talking—babbling, rather. Bentley could see his lips going, and the man's little ferret-eyes were looking at him, and he was leaning over into the aisle, but it was all mere pantomime.

"Can't hear you!" Bentley shouted that loud enough. The fat woman in the seat ahead turned and frowned. Leris merely ignored the shout and went on moving his lips, raising his voice a little. What in hell was it he was trying to say?

"Name of Graymaster—" That came through, and it snapped Bentley out of his revery like an icy douche.

"What's that?"

"Graymaster, I'm trying to tell you. That's what he called her, I'm sure. Thought you'd want to know."

Good God!

"Who? What? Where is she? Was she at the plane? Talk, Leris. Tell me—don't sit there staring."

"I've been trying to tell you," said Leris. Bentley leaned over, his head next to the other's. "She called to me and asked about you—said she wanted

to see you, but of course it was too late—gate closed, too—half a minute, only—"

"You fool! Where is she? How did you know her name?"

"The fellow in the gray coat, I said—had a woman with him—rather handsome, she was. Just as I left, they came up to her and spoke her name. . . . Graymaster, I really think it was. Odd, too. She screamed when she saw them. What's the matter with the girl, hysterical?"

DEAR God! Man in gray coat—with handsome woman. That poor girl, running right into them. Ross, of course. Ross and that damned decoy girl of his. Poor Lorraine, she wouldn't have a chance!

Of course it had to be that. It all fitted. It couldn't be anything else. That poor kid! She wouldn't have a chance with those gorillas. That one-eyed devil—His Highness, the Cyclops! Damn them all! Why did it have to happen that way? They had been listening in on that phone-call, of course. They would. They had people right in the hotel. Bentley had good reason to know that, all right. And so they knew the girl would come down to the airport. They played their chances fast and well. Wanted two birds with one stone. Plant that dame to get Bentley into the phone-booth. . . . Well, Ross would carry a mark on him for a while. Then they crept up on poor Lorraine. . . . God help her in their hands. They'd work on her. They'd—

He shivered. He hated to think of her before those damned foreigners. Mental, even physical torture—trying everything to drag some damned formula out of her. Uncle ought to keep her out of it. No work for a girl.

Then he blamed himself.

"If I had only hung around a minute instead of running out to the field—ought to have known—ought to have figured it. . . . Poor kid, I let her down."

Not quite true, of course, but he felt that, and it stung him. It took all the joy, all the purpose out of his trip. Money didn't matter now. Nor Personal Mystery, nor Brood nor Leris, nor Leris' mysterious "Principal." None of it mattered. Only one thing mattered—Lorraine.

"Damned fool," he told himself; "you'd think the girl really meant something to me—you'd think I was in love with her or something. . . . And I hardly know her, really."

It was a most miserable trip. Leris gave up, finally. He had tried to make conversation. He had done the courteous thing, but you couldn't do anything with this young idiot. What did the Senator see in him? What was all this publicity about him? "White Knight?" Where was his white suit? Perhaps he ought to have told the boy to wear it. Anyhow, it was plain the lad was dull and not at all the smart one the Senator had hoped. Couldn't talk to him. Acted as though he were sore just because of that girl. Letting women mix in business!

For hours, Leris gave up; but finally his own private purposes pushed him to try again. He leaned across the aisle. He fairly shouted. The young man was in a daze, a trance. He nodded or shook his head, but you could see he wasn't listening.

Leris shouting, Bentley sitting, thinking, aching, wondering and blaming himself. The motors roaring and making it hard for both of them. Tempers getting touchy. Impatience creeping in.

And then Leris' voice came through for a brief snatch and penetrated Bentley's consciousness.

"And so I warn you, young man—" Bentley got those words. "Officers of company—don't approve of Senator's ideas. . . . Respect and admire. . . . no patience with dominating ways."

What in the world was he talking about? Senator? What Senator? What in hell was the funny little man talking about? Or was this unnamed "principal" a Senator? Would that be it? And if so, what of it?

"Whatever he plans for you will only bring trouble," Leris was saying. "You can't buck an organization. I feel it is only my duty as a human being to warn you that it would be not only unwise but plain foolhardiness for you to accept any position which might jeopardize—"

BABBLE, babble, babble! The words came in mixed, half-heard snatches, largely deadened in their meaning by Bentley's own preoccupied thoughts; but clearly Leris was telling him something. And just as clearly, Leris was warning him against taking the job, whatever it was, that his "principal" had in store for him. Queer business. Queer set-up. Well, it didn't really matter.

"Ever since the Senator accepted his call to Washington," Leris was saying, "a good many members of the firm and

other officers have been determined that it is not only impracticable but wrong for him to hold the reins of power over an organization of which he is now only a remote part. There will be trouble for you, Mr. Destiny, if you are foolish enough to—"

But the rest of this was drowned by the motors.

Then, presently, it was dark. Then, suddenly it was nine o'clock, and the hostess was leaning over each one of the seats and saying in her sharp, trained-to-penetrate voice:

"Passengers for Springfield—twelve minutes. No time for dinner until we reach Garden City. . . . Springfield passengers ready now."

SENATOR AXEL G. PINKTON stood in the aisle of the large barrack-like room which, under normal conditions, was the regimented working-place of a hundred underpaid, overworked stenographers.

At the moment of which we write, however, conditions in the stenographic room were far from normal. It was, in the first place, long past closing time. The electric clock at the rear of the great room showed eight-thirty, an hour at which Pinkton's, Inc., ought to be dark and inoperative.

Moreover, the gentlemen who sat uncomfortably in the hard-backed chairs were not stenographers but the so-called "senior executives" of the great firm.

It was a moment of acute distress—to the senior executives and the four members of the Board who likewise had been commanded to be present. During twenty years and more, these men had grown accustomed to the caprices of a most capricious Axel G., but they had never grown to like them. And this evening, judging by the tone of the Senator's voice, his peculiar hushed and restrained manner, his glittering eye that passed over them, one by one, with a peculiarly malicious snap in it, something untoward and especially intolerable was in store for them.

Another thing that was awkward was that the Senator should have returned to Pinkton, anyhow. The directorate of Pinkton's had planned a little surprise for the Senator on his next visit; and his sudden appearance had, in its way, stymied their plan. Since Axel G. had accepted his "call" as Senator, he ought, they felt, to have obscured himself from active management of his firm. It ought to have been enough that he received

dividends amounting to something in six figures annually. Pinkwater, they argued, was a kind of racket, after all. Always had been. Selling spring-water from the ground at more than one thousand per cent gross profit could hardly be called anything else, in spite of the noble language of their advertisements. And as a racket, it seemed only just that all of Pinkton's retainers should be entitled to their cut.

So they had conspired. Petty larceny had grown into schism. Plans had been carefully laid. When next the stockholders of Pinkton's met, the Senator would find that he no longer controlled fifty-seven per cent of the stock, and that his authority over Pinkton's, Inc., was a thing of a legendary past.

But the Senator's arrival had knocked all these plans into a cocked hat. And once cocked, the hat was getting more and more cockeyed as the Senator delivered his message.

"Cheap, under-handed little mice!" he thundered. "You have cut your own throats, bitten the hand that fed you—cheap little mice."

The high-salaried "mice" squirmed in their seats. Faces were red. Faces were pale. But no man arose to give argument to the snowy-haired Senator.

"You had a gold-mine in your hands," Axel G. went on. "Yet you went in for petty larceny, stealing from one pocket to pay the other—graft, chiseling, mismanagement and fumbling. . . . Getting your heads together to outsmart me! Think I don't know? Think I'm such a fool? Think I didn't expect it?"

HE paced up and down the aisle between desks in short angry strides, glaring to the right and left, a vengeful nemesis.

"Of course I expected it!" he roared. "Mean, small-visioned little termites, all of you! There's money enough for all in Pinkwater, but you've been blind to it. I don't expect honesty; I don't expect loyalty. . . . I know you all. I gave you your jobs; I have known you from boyhood. Everything you are, your very souls, belong to Pinkwater—your houses and your clothes came from Pinkwater. But I don't expect gratitude. What I complain of is your short-sightedness, your total lack of imagination."

This was a new note. Something unusual was coming.

"There isn't," he went on, "enough imagination in the whole cheap little



"Cheap little mice!" he thundered. "You have bitten the hand that fed you!"

band of you to sell water-coolers in Hades. You can't even be dishonest with imagination. You've fumbled Pinkwater, and you've bungled your own crookedness."

They took it. They sat there and sweated and took it. Few men, indeed, would dare to confront Axel G. Pinkton when the torrent of his anger ran high.

"I could fire you all out of hand. I started to do it. I could shut Pinkton's down, dissolve the corporation and live the rest of my life on solid investments of my own. I don't need Pinkton's. Selfishly I could withdraw and let your house of cards tumble onto you."

They trembled. He could do just that; and jobs are scarce today for high-salaried men.

"But I will not do it. Not now, at any rate. I have a plan better than that. Set a thief to catch a thief. I'll put you all on probation. I accuse nobody personally. I accuse you all, and I'll bring you all down, or bring Pinkton's back in spite of you."

What was coming? Another of the Senator's fantastic flights of imagination?

"I'm hiring a man. I'm employing a dictator. This very night he arrives here. In a few minutes he will be here. He may be a bigger crook than any or all of you, but by the Lord, he's got imagination, and I'm willing to gamble on it!"

Now what was this? Who? What man? Was the Senator out of his head?

But the Senator was continuing:

"This young man laughed at me when I offered him a job at fifty thousand dollars a year. I would have made him general sales manager, but he laughed at me. He refused. He values himself at one million dollars a year, gentlemen. One million dollars. And a man is worth what he believes he's worth. I'm going to try him. I'll hire him. I'll pay him at that rate."

Crazy, of course. Too bad. The old man was in his dotage now. Really, he ought to be ousted. Somebody ought to do something.

"I'll put him in command of Pinkton's—absolute command. From this night on, none of you has any authority without my man. He can fire you and hire you. I give him *carte blanche*. For one month—no more—I give him absolute control of Pinkwater, of Pinkton's, Inc. Either he shows me in that time that I'm right in my gamble, or I'll dissolve Pinkton's. I'll close shop. I'll throw five thousand people out of a job if I have to—but I'll do it my way. I'm still here. I'm still running this show. I'll have none of your mouse tricks, none of your chiseling, none of your—"

THEN the telephone rang. The Senator stopped in his verbal outpouring, and snatched at the receiver.

"Hello!" he shouted. "Hello. . . . Huh? That you, Leris? Well, get down here with him. Get here fast. . . . What's that? Who asked you whether you like him or not? Shut up and get here. . . . No, don't tell him a thing. I'll handle him my own way. You get down here fast. I'll give you half an hour, hear?"

Then he turned to his still dazed audience.

"You measly little crooks!" he said quietly but vibrantly. "You petty chisellers! Unless I miss my guess, the man I'm putting in charge tonight will give you lessons."

The seventh month of Mr. Destiny's extraordinary adventure finds him in big money—and in big difficulty. Don't miss the next installment in the forthcoming June issue.

A Five-

Wherein the Pawnees offer five ponies in exchange for a scout's long hair. . . . As told to Vincent McCafferty.

I WAS graduated from high school in 1878. Father wanted us all together on the ranch, but the tedium of the ranch bored me, and I wanted to make my own way. Both Mother and Father realized that I would not be contented to stay, so a horse was secured for me, and I rode across the prairie bound toward adventure and fortune.

I visited my Uncle Sam Evans' ranch; and my cousin Tom—later to become famous as "Trapper Tom"—gave me a chance to go hunting and trapping with him in Indian Territory during the fall and winter.

The bulk of our fur was coyote skins. We would take a quarter of the carrion, tie it to the end of a lariat and drag it in a circle of about five miles through partially wooded country. About every three hundred feet we would stop, bore a hole in a tree eighteen inches from the ground and fill it with a mixture of arsenic and grease.

When the coyotes caught the scent of the carrion, they followed the trail and stopped at trees to lick our bait. A few such licks were all that was necessary to kill them. My task was to "ride the drag" every morning, collect the dead coyotes and skin them. We averaged ten skins a day, which sold from fifty to seventy-five cents, depending on their quality.

Although the money I made helped my folks considerably, I began to look upon myself as an undertaker for poisoned coyotes, and one morning just as spring was about due, I quit.

For many days I rode the prairie. My pleasant and aimless wanderings ended abruptly one morning when I found my horse had pulled his picket-pin during the night, and disappeared.

Ignorant of the direction he had taken, I picked up my gun and saddle and started for a hill near by from which I hoped to sight him.

I had not gone far when I heard whooping and shouting, and saw a band of Indians riding down on me.

Even at this late date Indians were known to make raids to get horses, and

horse Haircut

By PAWNEE BILL

(Major Gordon W. Lillie)



occasionally people in this unsettled country were murdered. I realized they would quickly overtake me, so I dropped the saddle and stood there waiting for them, with rifle ready for action.

I was soon surrounded by a band of young bucks. They were gesticulating, letting out whoops, and evincing the liveliest interest in me. Most of them had their heads shaved and ornamented with crests of feathers. Excepting for breechcloths, they were naked.

A young brave pointed to my hair. He held up one finger, and grunted: "Pony!"

I did not understand what he meant, and shook my head to show that I was puzzled. Then another Indian jerked my hair. He held up two fingers and grunted: "Pony!"

The two began arguing with each other and pointing at my hair. Another Indian, whom I figured was the chief, silenced them. He assumed a majestic attitude, arms folded across his chest, and gazed at me imperturbably. Then, indicating my flowing locks, the chief held up three fingers and said: "Pony!"

Then it dawned upon me that they were bargaining among themselves for my scalp. I looked about for a chance to escape, and rated myself for the stupidity that had let me stand there stock still while they surrounded me. The chief eyed me and again reached for my hair. I backed away, but the Indians behind me pushed me forward. I gripped my gun, determined that if they had my scalp, they would pay for it in lives. The chief's fingers were raised again, four of them this time.

"Pony!" he grunted with a doggedness that infuriated me.

Did he think that I would stand there while they auctioned me off? Still, in those split seconds, I tried to understand why they were offering me ponies, when

the chances were that when they got through with me, I'd never ride one again.

Suddenly one of the younger bucks came forward. In good English he informed me that it was my hair, not my scalp, that the chief desired. While I gaped at him, he assured me that he spoke the truth.

"Pony!" repeated the chief, holding up five fingers.

Five ponies for my hair! I marveled at his extravagance. It was a struggle to suppress the desire to accept his offer.

But as I prized that long hair very much, vanity made me loath to part with it. It made me look, I fancied, like a seasoned Indian scout. It is peculiar, the way a boy reconciled the effeminate appearance of long hair streaming over his thin shoulders with daring deeds. But there was the tradition of the scouts to maintain!

"Tell your chief that I value my hair as much as I do my life," I said to the interpreter, not wishing to offend them.

At that, the chief walked away haughtily.

I questioned the English-speaking brave. I wanted to know why this passion for hair made spendthrifts of these Indians. He replied that this was a hunting party of Pawnees, and explained the matter of negotiations for my hair.

The Pawnees had submitted themselves to the white man's law because of friendly association with the U.S. cavalry along the border, but they hated to give up their traditional scalp-taking. Since scalping was a punishable offense, they compromised. They would make a

REAL EXPERIENCES

In this department readers and writers meet to tell fact stories of their most interesting adventures. (For details of our Real Experience Contest, see page 3)

bargain with anyone who had a good head of hair. A good mane was worth five ponies, a flowing beard worth four.

When an agreement for such a purchase had been peaceably concluded, the Indians would withdraw while their "victim" waited. Suddenly they would charge, whooping and brandishing tomahawks. The brave who had bought the hair would dismount and remove his property, with scalping-knife, from face or head.

While I learned these facts, the Indians had been muttering. The brave who had first bid on my hair eyed my saddle, talked rapidly, and grinned. Soon the entire party was shrieking with joy. Before I knew what was happening, I was seized from behind and disarmed. It would have been futile to fight. I folded my arms, smiled contemptuously and wondered what devilry they were up to now. It didn't look like murder. They had a reputation for practical jokes, and it seemed I was to be the butt of one.

"They are going to present you with a horse," the young Indian beside me said. "Why this honor?" I asked warily.

An Indian gift usually had a sting to it. "Because you are going to ride him," he said impassively. "He is the most vicious animal that ever had a saddle on his back."

I DIDN'T relish the prospect. My experience with horses had been limited, and trying to ride a mankiller, was the last thing on earth I wanted to do right then; but when mocking smiles greeted my evident chagrin, I had to go through with it. Worst of all, there was the chance that after scaring me to death they would bring out a horse so docile that a baby could ride it. That would make me look foolish.

We returned to camp. I rode behind my interpreter, and he held my saddle in front of him. Several Indians set about catching the horse, a big roan which was grazing near by. From the trouble they had and the pains they were taking, I knew that this was no rocking-horse.

One brave crept up behind him close enough to rope him. The roan began to plunge and fight the noose. He snorted from distended nostrils, and let fly with his heels every time a buck neared him. One look at those hoofs, the savage eyes and the way his ears flattened back on his head showed me that I was in for a ride, but I vowed I would stick on, no matter what happened.

They finally got my saddle on him.

He reared the second I hit it, and began to buck. I saw that making him run was my only hope, so I dug in the spurs, and the roan thundered away, with the Pawnees astride their swift little ponies in pursuit.

I hung on, glued to the saddle, and in mortal fear of what would happen if I fell in the way of those hoofs. Again I dug in the spurs, and the roan plunged forward with an impetus that threw me up on his neck. I regained the saddle quickly and again gave him the spurs. Every long stride almost jarred me out of the saddle, but I held my seat. The only hope was to tire him out.

The Indians' yells had died away. They were so far behind that the only noise I heard was the rapid beat of the roan's hoofs. I was afraid to look back to see what had happened to the Pawnees.

THE magnificent strength of that animal was a thing for sheer admiration. Mile after mile of prairie swept by, and finally he settled down to a canter. I headed him back to camp then. I had no more fear of him, and I rode with assurance.

Miles back, I met the Indians. They had given up the race and were waiting to see if I would return. They began yelling when they saw me, and fell in behind as I pounded along, and I had the place of honor going back into camp.

They crowded around me with admiring grunts of congratulation. The praises which my interpreter translated went to my head like fire-water. I took off the saddle and turned the roan out to graze before watering. Now that it was over, I no longer resented the joke that had been intended. I found myself posing—boy-like—as disdainful of the praise of those who admired horsemanship, although my body ached from the ride.

The roan was now mine. I tried to refuse it at first, for it was a gift of considerable value. But I was told that the brave whose horse it was had lost ownership when I managed to ride it, that he would be insulted if I refused.

I made camp close to the tepee of the English-speaking Pawnees, and we became friends. I stayed there several weeks on a buffalo-hunt, and followed them from the Cimarron River to their reservation, where I attended a feast where mighty hunters with mighty appetites recited the glory they had won on the trip.

Borneo Monster



By MAJOR S. L. GLENISTER

I HAD lost my ship in Sandakan—had overstayed my leave; and when I came down to the wharf that hot morning, I found the old *Hindustan* had sailed without me. The harbor-master explained that the old man had got the offer of a good charter out of Batavia and Semarang, Java ports, shortly after I had gone ashore the previous afternoon; to obtain the charter the ship had to leave in ballast on the night tide. The captain had signed me off according to law; my navigation certificate, discharge and pay in full up to date, with a bonus of one month's pay for passage back to a shipping center, and my sea-kit were all in the harbor-master's office and only awaiting my signature. I had nothing to complain of. The old man had done the decent thing by me. He could have sailed without me, writing me down in the ship's log as a deserter, and without leaving my pay and belongings behind. But he knew that I was not willfully deserting the ship; he had had no hope of a quick charter when I had gone ashore on legal leave; and I could not blame him for not staying in port overnight when the offered charter called for an immediate departure.

But there I was in Sandakan, port of British North Borneo, with God knows how long to wait before an officer's berth would be vacant on any ship entering the port. I settled down to make the best of things. Borneo is a vast and sweltering tropical island, running some seven hundred miles from north to south, and some five hundred miles from east to west, great areas of which have not yet been thoroughly explored; the equator runs almost through the center of the island. The whole country teems with wild life; carnivorous animals such as tigers and leopards and other species of the cat family, wild boars, and innumerable

species of deer are common, together with enormous snakes and reptiles of every description; and the rivers are infested with swarms of huge crocodiles. The vegetation, except in the higher altitudes, is dense sweltering tropical jungle, with a wealth of orchids and carnivorous tropical plants and flowers.

The white population of Sandakan is not very large in numbers; and having nothing to do but kill time until a ship left for Singapore, I was soon on speaking terms with the majority of them. Before a week had gone by, I was very friendly with a Mr. Duncan McGregor, a Scotch engineer in the employ of the chartered company controlling the provinces known as North Borneo; one day while we were lunching at the club, he turned to me and said: "Glenister, if you care to stay in Borneo for a while, I can give you a temporary job that may last for five to six months. I am leaving Sandakan next week to run some survey lines for new roads through the interior; my assistant is down with black-water fever, and if he recovers, the medical officer will send him home on leave; he cannot stand the climate—has been down with malaria several times already, and a trip home is his only hope for complete recovery. The job means salary, expenses for kit, and all found." And he mentioned a sum that was quadruple the ordinary pay of a third officer in the mercantile marine.

I said: "That's a generous offer, McGregor; but I know nothing about surveying, and fail to see where I could be of any service to you."

"Don't worry about that," said McGregor; "you're a navigation officer; your instrument is a sextant. It happens there is nobody else here at the moment qualified for the job, and I think you can be more useful to me than any other man I could get locally. With your knowledge

of using a sextant and the mathematics of navigation, it will be quite a simple matter to break you in to using an engineer's level and transit. But I warn you we are going through a fever-ridden country, and you are unseasoned to the climate; there may possibly be trouble with the head-hunters, as well. The job is no sinecure, and you will earn every cent you get; but if you want to risk the possibility of running afoul of a man-eating tiger or leopard, feeling a cobra's fangs or losing your curly-haired crown to the head-hunters, the job is yours!"

Well, I'm always ready to take a chance, so during the next few days McGregor taught me how to handle a level and transit, and something about running a line; and the following week we were on our way, blazing a trail through dense tropical jungles, so that the white man's roads could be built. As McGregor had said, it was no sinecure; we were tormented by hordes of mosquitoes and other flying pests; we were streaming with perspiration till our clothes were sodden, torn and scratched by innumerable thorns and other prickly plants, tramping through swamps where we sank almost ankle-deep in slimy mud, drenched to the skin with tropical downpours, baked till the skin of our faces and arms peeled and cracked; and very often we spent the evening in extracting jiggers from the soles of our feet.

McGregor and I were the only white men engaged on the job, but we had a Malay orderly, a Chinese cook with two assistants of his own race who acted as our body-servants and waited on us at meals, a Sikh foreman, two Malay chainmen, and a number of Dyak porters who often had to cut a passage through the dense jungle.

We carried a couple of sporting rifles and large-bore double-barreled shotguns, and from time to time brought down a buck or a wild pig, which made a welcome change from the eternal canned food. We both carried revolvers and hunting-knives on our persons.

ONE evening—during the third month of our labors—as the sun was setting in crimson and gold behind the towering summit of Mount Kinabalu, we came across a couple of large unoccupied native shelters, each big enough to accommodate thirty or forty men.

These shelters were built of heavy untrimmed palm-trunks supporting slightly lighter palm-trunk cross-beams, which

carried a heavy thatched roof, and were walled in with layers of palm leaves. After looking them over, McGregor said we would camp in them for the night instead of setting up our tents; and we took the best-preserved one for our dining and sleeping quarters, telling the Chinks to use the other for a cook-house. The cook and his assistants, the Sikh foreman, and the three Malays would probably use it for a dormitory after supper was cooked and disposed of. Our Dyak porters were camped down-wind, five hundred yards away—we never allowed them to camp any nearer to us, owing to their fondness for putrefied meat.

After our body-servants had arranged our equipment and kits in the hut, filled our folding canvas tubs with muddy water from a water-hole, and we had bathed the sweat and grime of travel from our bodies, we got into pajamas and sat down at our folding table ready for supper. Just as one of the Chinks entered with a covered tureen of hot canned soup, however, a gust of wind rustled the thatched roof, and we were smothered in a shower of dust, dried grass stems, and crawling insects.

This was bad enough, but worse was to come. We heard a chorus of yells and curses in three languages, and our servants, Sikh, Chinese and Malay, erupted from the cook-house and rushed into our quarters as if the devil were after them. They were all gesticulating and talking at once. McGregor commanded Mahommed Singh, the Sikh foreman, to explain.

The Sikh, an old retired rissaldar of the Indian Army, raised his hand in a military salute. "Sahib," he said, "what it is I know not. But it has invaded the cook-house; it has taken possession of the cook-house and all that it contains of the sahib's goods. It has driven us out, and we are sore afraid. We think it is the devil himself. I am an old soldier, sahib; long and faithfully have I served in the army in India, and no man has dared say to my face that I am coward. But the devil is a different matter, sahib! I was afraid and ran with these low-caste Malays and Chinese. Are there any orders, sahib?"

Erect and soldierly, though trembling, he stood, fingering his fine black beard, and awaiting his beloved sahib's orders.

The Malay orderly, trembling with fearsome agitation, broke in: "Make haste, tuan! The devil is in the cook-house! Make haste and bring your gun

before he tears us all apart! Tuan, I verily believe it is the father of all devils! Make haste and talk to him before he eats us alive, for he is angry, tuan; already I can feel myself being swallowed alive down into the darkness of his hungry belly!"

We looked at the Chinese, and their faces were blanched under their yellow skins; their mouths opened and closed under an extremity of awe and horror, but no words issued from their lips.

"What the devil can it be!" said McGregor. "Glenister, you are the best shot. Get the heavy-bore shotgun, and let's go and see."

We pulled on our knee-high boots, and the two of us made for the other hut, the servants all following at our heels. The Sikh was right behind us when we reached the doorway, but the Malays and Chinks huddled together twenty feet away, ready to flee.

IT was a dark night, but as we crossed the open space between the two huts we could just discern the outline of the roofs against the sky. The doorway of the other hut was faintly illuminated by a light burning inside; and as we reached it and peered within we saw that a single candle was burning on the cook's folding table. I had loaded two cartridges into the chambers of our heavy double-barreled shotgun before leaving our quarters, and holding the weapon in readiness I thrust my head forward into the gloom of the semi-dark interior.

The light was so dim that I could see nothing; before my eyes could become accustomed to the gloom, I heard a tremendous creaking of the rafters, and in the same moment, before I had a chance to withdraw my head, something swung out of the darkness overhead, knocked over the candle and struck me a staggering blow on my jaw. The force of the blow was tremendous, and staggered me backward from the open doorway; I saw stars, and for a few seconds had difficulty in retaining my balance, my head reeling with that shattering sensation that comes from a well-placed upward-driven punch on the point of the jaw; but even in my dazed condition I was conscious of something horrible and disgusting in the contact of my flesh with the thing that had struck me. And all the lower part of my face was smothered with some thick clammy oozy evil-smelling stuff.

Recovering quickly from my momentary dizziness, I shouted to Mahommed

Singh to hold aloft the hurricane-lamp that he was carrying; and as the flame of the swaying lamp in his trembling grasp illuminated the interior of the hut, the roof-beams creaked and groaned again, and into the halo of uncertain light, swinging out of the darkness overhead there suddenly appeared a *Face*.

And that Face filled me with awe and horror; I could feel a sensation of sickening fear running up and down my spine. There it hung, poised in mid-air, suspended and detached, distinctly seen even in the wavering lantern-light, a face in which all the evil torment of past centuries seemed absorbed—a monstrous evil thing, with fixed features that glared and grinned like a hideous living gargoyle, set in a head that writhed and squirmed this way and that as though supported by a serpentine but invisible neck, and cast a dark and mysterious shadow behind it. The Thing's protruding eyes were glassy, and eloquent of the most awful despair. Its gums were drawn back in a rigid snarl, and showed its yellowish-white fangs locked together. The skin of the horrible face was rough and mottled like wet fur, and the entire countenance was dripping with a slimy ooze. The face seemed about the size of that of a large Newfoundland dog, and though its features were motionless, it rose and fell and swung back and forth with never-ceasing undulations.

Mahommed Singh got one good look at that hideous face; the next instant a yell of terror issued from his lips, and he leaped backward, dropping the lantern in his frenzy of fear. The light went out, leaving us in absolute darkness; McGregor and I backed quickly from the open doorway, snatched up the lantern and ran like mad for the shelter of our quarters. The Malays and Chinks, seeing us run, fled helter-skelter downwind, carrying terror and dismay to the Dyak camp.

WITHIN our quarters again, Mahommed Singh relighted the hurricane lantern with trembling fingers, and McGregor and I wiped the sweat from our brows and faces.

"What was it? What in the name of God was the damnable thing?" ejaculated McGregor.

"Did I not truly say it was the devil, sahib! I think now it was the very father of all the devils escaped from Eblis! May Allah protect us!" said Mahommed Singh.

"I don't know what the thing is," I put in, "but I'm going back to shoot it."

With our nerves on edge, the three of us again sallied forth to solve the mystery or die in the attempt. This time McGregor took charge of the lantern. Reaching the doorway of the cook-house, he held the lantern aloft to give me light to shoot when the opportunity presented itself.

I stood in that open doorway with my gun in readiness and my finger on the triggers. For the space of a few seconds nothing was to be seen or heard. The suspense of waiting for that awful Thing to appear was nerve-straining; I could feel my heart throbbing like a steam piston.

Once more the rafters creaked, and once more that awful Face swung forward across the hut; and for a brief moment it was undulating in the rays of the lantern. But this time I was prepared and ready for its appearance. Getting a bead dead center on the grinning horror, I pulled both triggers at once; the hut reverberated with the crash of the two heavy buckshot cartridges, and filled with clouds of smoke; the Face swung backward out of sight. Immediately the creaking groaning noises sounded from the beams overhead; a terrible thrashing and rustling followed and lasted for a few moments; then the sound of a heavy leathery thud upon the mud floor of the hut, and silence.

McGregor and I rushed into the hut, straining our eyes to see through the smoke. As the smoke cleared, we saw a huge python, almost twenty feet in length, lying dead and uncoiled upon the earthen floor. The reptile had been engaged in the pleasing occupation of swallowing a fairly large black panther, hind-part first. So nearly had it completed its gastronomic orgy that only the head and face of the panther remained in its elastic jaws. The poor brute had probably sunk all its claws into the python's gullet, making it impossible for the huge serpent to swallow it further down; the panther's head and face were left framed in the elastic jaws of the reptile. This had probably accounted for the spasmodic contortions of the great snake.

"Nothing to worry about; a python with a bad stomachache; it's all quite simple," said McGregor, "now that we know what it is. But awhile ago—well—as Mahommed Singh said, it was the very father of all the devils!"

The Prophet

A weird and dangerous encounter with a Mohammedan mob.

MOHAMMED the Prophet was that rare Oriental, a man without sons—a fact which though interesting might appear unlikely, time and distance considered, to have much influence on the destiny of an American in 1920. Notwithstanding, one of the weirdest and most gruesome adventures I experienced during six years' residence in the Near East hinged on that fact.

Though Mohammed had no sons, he did have one daughter, Fatima by name, who married her father's cousin Ali. Fatima had two sons: Hassan—who died in youth—and Hussein, who recruited seventy-six followers to support his claim to the title of *imam* against Aboubekir, nephew of Mohammed father-in-law and chief pretender to the prophet's cloak. The resourceful Aboubekir, however, promptly quashed this opposition by the elementary procedure of removing Hussein's ambitious head, after inflicting 1,951 wounds on his rebellious body. Hussein alive had only seventy-six followers; Hussein dead became a martyr whose death split the church wide open. His severed head upon being impaled on a pole and exhibited to Aboubekir, immediately opened its dead lips and loudly cried: "There is no God but God, and Mohammed is his prophet!"

Followers of the martyred Hussein formed the Shia sect, which to this day annually commemorates his death in a ten-day orgy of flagellation, self-torture and unleashed emotions. On the tenth day Hussein's death is reenacted in a mighty passion play—when the peaceful Shias become as raging lions.

I was not without qualms, therefore, when I agreed to accompany a fellow-Texan to the Persian quarter of Tiflis to watch a *Shaxay-vaxay*—as the *Mogarem*, or Shia period of mourning is called. It is so called from the staccato wail of the mourners—*shah Hussein! Vai Hussein!*—which usage has contracted into a chant like *Shaxay! Vaxay!* My companion was a sailor in the U. S. Navy whose ship had just arrived at Batoum from Constantinople, where he had heard of the coming ceremony. He was a rabid

Loves a Redhead

By
J. C. CHEVALIER

"camera-hound," and hoped to get some shots. I immediately vetoed that plan.

"If you were discovered taking photographs by a fanatical crowd at a *Shaxay-vaxay*, you would be torn limb from limb," I told him. And this is exactly what was happening at just about that hour, and for the identical reason, to the American consul at Teheran several hundred miles away.

My friend ridiculed my fears, but reluctantly agreed to leave his camera behind. He did appear, however, with a small flat leather case suspended about his neck on a leather strap. I assumed it was a pair of binoculars, and urged him to slip the case inside his jacket.

The crowd was milling back and forth in the narrow streets; and individual parades were converging on the *maidan*, or bazaar square. Their shouts were loud and wild despite nine previous days of fasting and torture.

We elbowed our path through a mob of Shias resplendent in holiday garments, who were, however, not participating in the spectacle except for occasional shouts of "*Shaxay! Vaxay!*" This was not unusual, for it is possible for a Shia to avoid torturing himself in the parade without loss of piety if he has been zealous in youth, or if he is wealthy enough to employ a proxy to suffer in his place.

A barricade of trestle tables from the bazaar held the crowd back from flooding the entire square, and in the open space beyond I noticed a sort of pavilion had been set up. This, I surmised, was the place where Aboubekir, the usurper, was to sit, and before which the miracle of the talking head would be reenacted. In a few moments a man in humble native dress over which a remnant of rich brocade had been draped appeared and seated himself on a rug beneath the pavilion. He represented Aboubekir. A group of men with stout cudgels lounged about the pavilion, evidently portraying the army of Aboubekir.

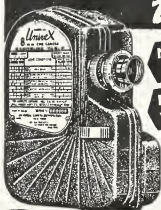
During the thirteen centuries since the death of Blessed Hussein, the Shias have never ceased devising new and novel methods for torturing their bodies in

sympathy and grief for the 1,951 wounds their martyr endured. As I watched the frenzied fanatics marching into the marketplace, I saw men with knives thrust through their arms, and blood dripping from the wounds. Others had large needles fixed through folds of skin on their shaven scalps and foreheads. Still others, stripped to the belt, were flailing themselves with a variety of implements. Some wielded whips of chain or leather thongs, some had common grain-flails; some swung knouts made of rope strands through which they had thrust dozens of nails, or on the ends of which they had tied fragments of iron.

One man, marching along as noisily and springily as any other, had several heavy padlocks snapped through the flesh of his chest. A group of small boys, one among many, held bunches of split bamboo reeds with which they had flailed their skinny backs and ribs so lustily that the razorlike edges had lacerated every visible inch of their blood-bathed nakedness. Many marchers carried sharp *kindjals* and whacked their chests or scalps with the keen edges, or prodded their bodies with the slender points. One man held a long curved saber in both hands and made vicious upward swings at the top of his own head. Alongside marched a friend with a billet of wood with which he belabored his own poll, stopping always just in the nick of time to interpose the stick between the descending sword and his neighbor's bloody pate—a sort of coöperative self-torture.

BY this time arriving processions had filled the square with their milling, sweating, bleeding bodies, and the air was filled with their combined wailing. Apparently they had begun to take for reality this mad ceremony of which they were a part, for they fell upon the luckless actor playing the part of Aboubekir with a violence as great as the original offender himself might have evoked. Nor did the actors representing Aboubekir's soldiers fare any better. Their long cudgels were wrenched from their hands, and they were soundly beaten.

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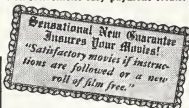
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**It's Smart To Own The
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It was, I had just decided, a good time to leave, and was about to say as much to my companion, when I saw him with his "binoculars" glued to his nose! Too late I recognized the object for a candid camera, although I had never seen one before. Even as my hand snatched it under cover, he and I were flung to the street under an avalanche of screaming, fighting Moslems shouting: "Kill! Beat! Bismallah, Name of God, kill!"

Their own frenzy, however, and the fact most of them had not the faintest idea whom they were supposed to kill, was our greatest advantage. Before they found out, they had been driven back by a group of cooler heads. I got shakily to my feet; the sailor lay senseless on the ground. A man held me firmly by the arm and was arguing with the mob in rapid Persian. I recognized him as a prosperous rug-merchant to whom I had occasionally introduced visitors to Tiflis.

"What dirt are you eating?" he shouted at the growling throng. "Can you not see with your own eyes that he is a *kizil-bash*" (a redhead), "and that he wears a skullcap prescribed for the faithful?" And the merchant exhibited the sailor's white hat in his free hand.

I realized the merchant was playing on the Persians' strong veneration for red hair. This is a hang-over from ancient Persia of the fire-worshippers, when red was the sacred color. A natural redhead is, and probably always has been, as rare in Persia as an albino negro, but the Persian loves to redden his beard, the ruff of hair around his shaven poll, the soles of his feet, and his favorite fighting ram with henna on every holiday.

The mob was easily convinced, and its anger turned at once to shame and pity. "Let us carry him to the baths and wash his wounds," they begged.

The sailor was recovering now, and we hoisted him onto his wavering legs. But if that mob had seen him stripped in a public bath, we'd have been in a predicament even worse than at first, and with our good Samaritan to keep us company. We firmly refused the offer of a bath for my friend, and hastily led him out of the *maidan* toward the nearest cab-stand.

The merchant suspected, and I knew, that under the sailor's blouse was a chest overgrown with curly red hair. Now, a true Shia venerates red hair on his head and in his beard; but he spends a great share of one day in seven removing every vestige of hair—red or otherwise—from every other part of his body.

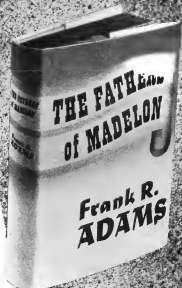
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